

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



3 1761 01056851 7

PR

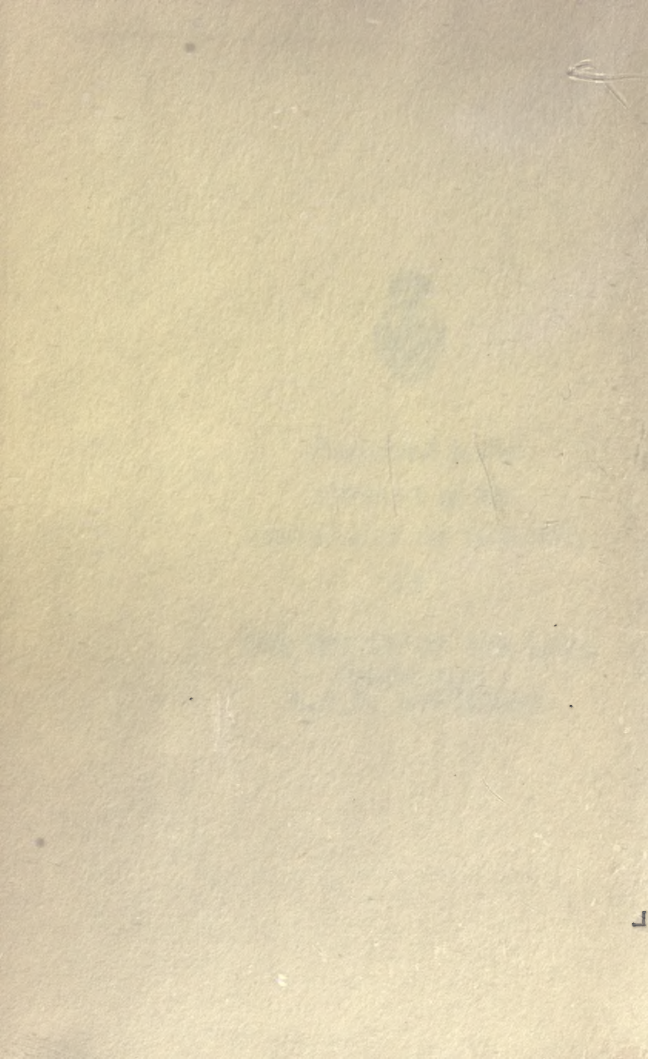
4771

H4



Presented to the
LIBRARY *of the*
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
by

THE ESTATE OF THE LATE
PROFESSOR
A.S.P. WOODHOUSE



(32) 1

HAZLITT'S ESSAYS

A SELECTION

With an Introduction by

HERBERT PAUL

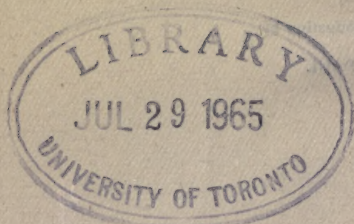
CASELL AND COMPANY, LIMITED
LONDON, PARIS, NEW YORK
AND MELBOURNE. MCMV

All Rights Reserved

HAZLITT'S ESSAYS

A SELECTION

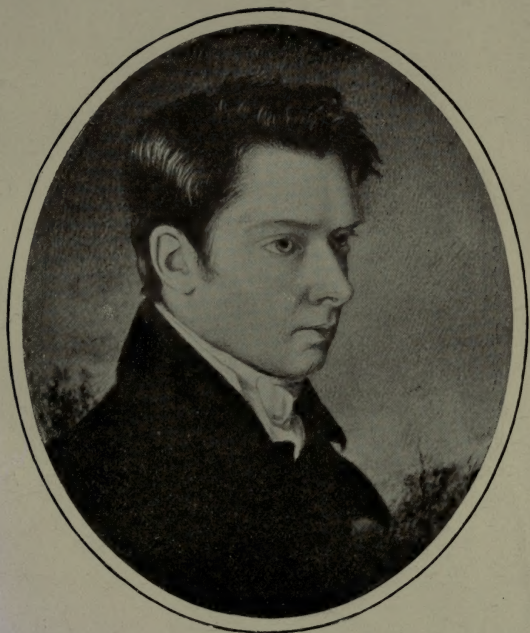
PR
4771
H4



995771

CASSELL AND COMPANY, LIMITED
LONDON, PARIS, NEW YORK
AND MELBOURNE, MCMV

All Rights Reserved



WILLIAM HAZLITT.

From the Portrait by John Hazlitt.

*By permission from the Miniature in the
Possession of W. Carew Hazlitt, Esq.*

CASELL'S NATIONAL LIBRARY

HAZLITT'S ESSAYS

List of the Volumes already issued of CASSELL'S NATIONAL LIBRARY.

NEW SERIES.

* Unless otherwise stated the Volumes contain an Introduction by
Prof. HENRY MORLEY.

- 1.—SILAS MARNER—GEORGE ELIOT. Intro. STUART J. REID.
- 2.—A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY—L. STERNE. Intro. L. F. AUSTIN.
- 3.—RICHARD II.—SHAKESPEARE.
- 4.—BROWNING'S POEMS—(Selection). Intro. A. D. INNES.
- 5.—ON HEROES AND HERO WORSHIP—CARLYLE.
- 6.—A CHRISTMAS CAROL AND THE CHIMES—CHARLES DICKENS.
- 7.—THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD—GOLDSMITH. Intro. SIR HENRY IRVING.
- 8.—MACBETH—SHAKESPEARE.
- 9.—EVELYN'S DIARY—(Reign of Charles II.). Intro. AUSTIN DOBSON.
- 10.—JOHNSON'S RASSELAS.
- 11.—THE FOUR GEORGES—W. M. THACKERAY. Intro. L. F. AUSTIN.
- 12.—JULIUS CÆSAR—SHAKESPEARE.
- 13.—TENNYSON'S POEMS—(Selection). Intro. A. T. QUILLER-COUCH.
- 14.—THE MERCHANT OF VENICE—SHAKESPEARE.
- 15.—EDGAR ALLAN POE'S TALES—(Selection). Intro. TIGHE HOPKINS.
- 16.—THE LADY OF THE LAKE—SIR WALTER SCOTT.
- 17.—EMERSON'S ESSAYS—(Selection). Intro. C. LEWIS HIND.
- 18.—HAMLET—SHAKESPEARE.
- 19.—GOLDSMITH'S PLAYS.
- 20.—BURNS'S POEMS—(Selection). Intro. NEIL MUNRO.
- 21.—MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING—SHAKESPEARE.
- 22.—BUNYAN'S PILGRIM'S PROGRESS. Intro. G. K. CHESTERTON.
- 23.—SHERIDAN'S PLAYS: "The Rivals" and "The School for Scandal."
- 24.—MACAULAY'S LAYS OF ANCIENT ROME.
- 25.—NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S TALES. Intro. FRANK MATHEW.
- 26.—TWELFTH-NIGHT—SHAKESPEARE.
- 27.—HORACE WALPOLE'S LETTERS—(Selection). Intro. STUART J. REID.
- 28.—MARMION—SIR WALTER SCOTT.
- 29.—THE TEMPEST—SHAKESPEARE.
- 30.—SOUTHEY'S LIFE OF NELSON.
- 31.—THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH—CHARLES DICKENS.
- 32.—OTHELLO—SHAKESPEARE.
- 33.—STEELE AND ADDISON'S "SIR ROGER DE COVERLEY."
- 34.—A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM—SHAKESPEARE.
- 35.—CARLYLE ON BURNS AND SCOTT.
- 36.—MILTON'S PARADISE LOST.—I.
- 37.—MILTON'S PARADISE LOST.—II.
- 38.—MACAULAY'S WARREN HASTINGS.
- 39.—AS YOU LIKE IT—SHAKESPEARE.
- 40.—CHILDE HAROLD'S PILGRIMAGE—LORD BYRON.
- 41.—KING LEAR—SHAKESPEARE.
- 42.—BACON'S ESSAYS.
- 43.—UTOPIA—SIR THOMAS MORE.
- 44.—ROMEO AND JULIET—SHAKESPEARE.
- 45.—COMPLETE ANGLER—ISAAC WALTON.
- 46.—HAKLUYT'S DISCOVERY OF MUSCOVY.
- 47.—CARLYLE'S SARTOR RESARTUS. Intro. G. K. CHESTERTON.
- 48.—KING JOHN—SHAKESPEARE.
- 49.—THE MEMORABLE THOUGHTS OF SOCRATES.
- 50.—BURLEIGH, &c.—MACAULAY.
- 51.—BURKE'S THOUGHTS ON THE PRESENT DISCONTENTS.
- 52.—TALES FROM THE DECAMERON—BOCCACCIO.
- 53.—HENRY V.—SHAKESPEARE.
- 54.—ESSAYS AND TALES—ADDISON.
- 55.—MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR—SHAKESPEARE.
- 56.—ESSAYS OF ELIA—CHARLES LAMB. Intro. WILLIAM ARCHER.
- 57.—AREOPAGITICA—MILTON.
- 58.—THE BATTLE OF LIFE—CHARLES DICKENS.
- 59.—VOYAGES AND TRAVELS—MARCO POLO.
- 60.—GRACE ABOUNDING—JOHN BUNYAN.
- 61.—THE WINTER'S TALE—SHAKESPEARE.
- 62.—HAZLITT'S ESSAYS. Intro. HERBERT PAUL.

FORTHCOMING VOLUMES:

- 63.—HENRY VIII.—SHAKESPEARE.
- 64.—DRYDEN'S POEMS.
- 65.—BACON'S WISDOM OF THE ANCIENTS.
- 66.—PROMETHEUS UNBOUND—SHELLEY.
- 67.—BURKE'S ESSAYS ON THE SUBLIME AND BEAUTIFUL.

CONTENTS.



	PAGE
Introduction	7
My First Acquaintance with Poets	13
Of Persons One Would Wish to Have Seen	40
On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth	60
The Indian Jugglers	70
On Living to One's Self	91
On Going a Journey	109
Why Distant Objects Please	124
Merry England	139
On a Sun-Dial	158
On Disagreeable People	173

INTRODUCTION.

SOME men are born essayists ; some achieve the art of essay-writing ; others, as I know only too well, have it thrust upon them. If there has ever been a born essayist, it was William Hazlitt. Except his friend Charles Lamb, of whom he has given by far the best description, no English writer surpasses him in this peculiar line. Francis Bacon and David Hume were far greater men ; but their essays were an accident, not the essence, of their greatness. It is as philosophers that they are, and always will be remembered. Hazlitt, though he dabbled in metaphysics, was no philosopher, but simply a journalist and a man of letters. Bacon's essays are not so much works of art, complete in themselves, as detached fragments from a mighty mind, overcharged with thought, and breaking into aphorisms. Macaulay's, even more popular than Bacon's, are historical and biographical rhetoric, preparations for the work of his life, the ground of his fame. Hazlitt's Essays, like Lamb's, and the illustrious Montaigne's, are himself. "The King has read your book," said some courtier to Montaigne, "and wants to know you." "If the King knows my book," was the answer, "he knows me." Without exalting Hazlitt into a class which it takes centuries and all the world to fill, one may say that he put into his essays the best he had. The exquisite humour, the poetic fancy of Lamb were not, indeed,

his. Though quite capable of strange aberrations from common sense and ordinary morals, he had an intellect too keen and too regular for that primrose path of dalliance with whimsical oddity which Lamb loved to tread. It would have taken Hazlitt to the everlasting bonfire which waits for all affected humour. Hazlitt was far too wise, and far too individual, to copy other people. Other people, on the contrary, have copied him. As Mr. Birrell, who has paid true honour to Hazlitt's memory by writing his life within reasonable compass, and quoting his works with adequate profusion, said long ago in "Obiter Dicta," you may live for a month like a gentleman on Hazlitt's ideas. It is this fulness of ideas which makes him so refreshing to read. He wrote, not because he was obliged to write, nor even because he wanted to write, but because he had something to say. If he ever stopped to scratch his head, he has not, like some unhappy wights, unconsciously marked the spot.

Hazlitt, though he lived in the best society, the society of Lamb, Wordsworth, Southey, Coleridge, and Leigh Hunt, was not personally popular. He had many enemies, of whom the bitterest was editor of the *Quarterly Review*, and he was subject to many attacks. His assailants are so utterly forgotten that they need not be enumerated here. Being by nature quarrelsome and by no means patient under rebuke, he abounded in aggressive defence, long since forgotten, because doubly needless when everyone reads Hazlitt, and no one reads Gifford. A couple of sentences, however, deserve to be quoted for their truth and candour. "To a want of general reading I plead guilty, and am sorry

for it ; but perhaps if I had read more, I might have thought less. . . . If there is haste or want of method, there is no common place, nor a line that licks the dust." If there is no false modesty in this estimate, there is also no boasting. I doubt whether any other writer has more justly, or less partially, appraised himself. Few men have written the English language better than Hazlitt. Not one has written it with more serious dignity, with more respect for the language and for himself. The Englishman who forgets, as Hazlitt never forgot, that Shakespeare's language is his mother tongue, ignores a lesson of something else besides humility. Soiled with all ignoble use as it is, battered and tattered by the jargon of coteries and the slang of cliques, English remains the noblest instrument of human thought fashioned by the ages since Greece decayed. It suffered nothing in the hands of Hazlitt. Although he confessed that he did not read generally, and might have added that he did not quote accurately, even from the Bible, he cast his thoughts in a shape neither difficult to apprehend nor easy to forget. He may perhaps be too fond of antithesis in style, and of paradox in thought, as when he said that Thomas Campbell paid the most attention to expression when there was the least to express, and substituted the decomposition of prose for the composition of poetry. Every writer of English prose except Swift has his faults, and the faultlessness of Swift's style is apt to pall. Hazlitt is not monotonous. He knew how to vary the cadence and rhythm of his sentences without obviously aiming at change. As we begin an essay of Hazlitt's, we feel that we have got into the best possible company, and

are sure of such entertainment as only a mind that thinks for itself can give. Unless he tried to analyse the character of a popular statesman, Hazlitt could not be dull.

The ten essays comprised in this volume will be found, I hope, good specimens of Hazlitt's various moods and tones. They are no more than specimens ; and if they send the reader to the books from which they are taken, he will have reason to be grateful. The first essay is from the collection called " Winterslow," by Hazlitt's son, who published it in 1850, twenty years after his father's death. " My First Acquaintance with Poets " is chiefly memorable because it contains the noblest tribute ever paid to the splendid genius of Coleridge, which Carlyle, in his " Life of Sterling," showed with much eloquence and humour that he could not appreciate at all. The essay " Of Persons One Would Wish to Have Seen " must at least make everyone wish to have seen Charles Lamb, whose inimitable talk is here less described than set down. Hazlitt's relations with his friends were not always friendly ; but when he was minded to do them justice, he did it on a princely scale, and he would have been an incomparable biographer. Who can forget Coleridge roused from his nap after luncheon, and forthwith beginning to talk for three hours about the third heaven, which he had just seen in a vision ? Or Wordsworth, sitting down to half a cheese, with the remark that his marriage to experience had not made him appreciate the good things of life so keenly as Mr. Southey ? " The Indian Jugglers," from " Table Talk," belongs to a different order of ideas, and another school of composition. Hazlitt's powers

of description were quite equal to his fertility of thought, and this essay fully displays them. Take the first sentence from this essay as an illustration. There could hardly be a more appropriate example of the Horatian precept that an author should plunge at once into the middle of his subject. What is greatness? Hazlitt can at least tell us what it is not: "No art terminating in itself constitutes greatness." Otherwise "The Indian Jugglers" would be great, and Sir Humphry Davy, and the famous fives player, Jack Cavanagh, whom Hazlitt has immortalised in a freak.

When Hazlitt says that he should like well enough to spend the whole of his life in travelling abroad, if he could anywhere borrow another life to spend afterwards at home, we feel how insufficient for his energies were his fifty-two years. He could have done so well with a hundred. And yet he lived every moment with intensity. "The French," he says in the essay "On a Sun-Dial," very unjustly, "the French attach no importance to anything, except for the moment." "I like a people who have something that they love and something that they hate," as he expresses himself in the same place. No one could accuse Hazlitt of falling short in either direction. He loved not wisely but too well, and he was a very good hater. He was a vivid man, and his essays are the reflection of an untiringly active mind. Himself a painter, though not a successful one, he shared the taste of his age, with its admiration of Claude and Poussin, whom Ruskin afterwards denounced in all the panoply of indignant eloquence. Only an artist could have written the essay, "Why Distant Objects Please." "Passion is lord of infinite

space, and distant objects please because they border on its confines, and are moulded by its touch." If this comes dangerously near the paradox that things look more beautiful the less you can see of them, we must not forget that Hazlitt cites in favour of his proposition a concrete example. "When I was a boy, I lived within sight of a range of lofty hills, whose blue tops blending with the setting sun had often tempted my longing eyes and wandering feet. At last I put my project in execution, and on a nearer approach, instead of glimmering air woven into fantastic shapes, found there huge bumpish heaps of discoloured earth." Hazlitt was not devoid of egoism, and does not shrink from saying what he has said before, or from putting his previous remarks in inverted commas, so that there may be no mistake. But his use of personal experience is originality, not egoism. When he wrote about nature, he drew upon what he had seen, not what he had read. His thoughts are William Hazlitt's, not Coleridge's, nor another's. Professor Saintsbury, in his "Short History of English Literature," calls Hazlitt "one of the very greatest critics who have ever lived." It is not the purpose of this selection to show him as a literary commentator. Mr. Saintsbury's judgment may be tested, and will soon be verified, by reference to Hazlitt's "Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth." It is as a miscellaneous essayist that he now makes his appearance, and in that character custom can never stale his infinite variety. HERBERT PAUL.

HAZLITT'S ESSAYS.

(A SELECTION.)

MY FIRST ACQUAINTANCE WITH POETS.

MY father was a Dissenting Minister, at Wem, in Shropshire ; and in the year 1798 (the figures that compose the date are to me like the “dreaded name of Demogorgon”) Mr. Coleridge came to Shrewsbury, to succeed Mr. Rowe in the spiritual charge of a Unitarian Congregation there. He did not come till late on the Saturday afternoon before he was to preach ; and Mr. Rowe, who himself went down to the coach, in a state of anxiety and expectation, to look for the arrival of his successor, could find no one at all answering the description but a round-faced man, in a short black coat (like a shooting-jacket) which hardly seemed to have been made for him, but who seemed to be talking at a great rate to his fellow passengers. Mr. Rowe had scarce returned to give an account of his disappointment when the round-faced man in black entered, and dissipated all doubts on the subject by beginning to talk. He did not cease while he stayed ; nor has he since, that I know of. He held the good town of Shrewsbury in delightful suspense for three weeks that he remained there, “fluttering the

proud Salopians, like an eagle in a dove-cote" ; and the Welch mountains that skirt the horizon with their tempestuous confusion, agree to have heard no such mystic sounds since the days of

" High-born Hoel's harp or soft Llewellyn's lay."

As we passed along between Wem and Shrewsbury, and I eyed their blue tops seen through the wintry branches, or the red rustling leaves of the sturdy oak-trees by the road-side, a sound was in my ears as of a Syren's song ; I was stunned, startled with it, as from deep sleep ; but I had no notion then that I should ever be able to express my admiration to others in motley imagery or quaint allusion, till the light of his genius shone into my soul, like the sun's rays glittering in the puddles of the road. I was at that time dumb, inarticulate, helpless, like a worm by the way-side, crushed, bleeding, lifeless ; but now, bursting the deadly bands that bound them,

" With Styx nine times round them,"

my ideas float on winged words, and as they expand their plumes, catch the golden light of other years. My soul has indeed remained in its original bondage, dark, obscure, with longings infinite and unsatisfied ; my heart, shut up in the prison-house of this rude clay, has never found, nor will it ever find, a heart to speak to ; but that my understanding also did not remain dumb and brutish, or at length found a language to express itself, I owe to Coleridge. But this is not to my purpose.

My father lived ten miles from Shrewsbury, and was in the habit of exchanging visits with Mr. Rowe, and

with Mr. Jenkins of Whitchurch (nine miles farther on), according to the custom of Dissenting Ministers in each other's neighbourhood. A line of communication is thus established, by which the flame of civil and religious liberty is kept alive, and nourishes its smouldering fire unquenchable, like the fires in the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus, placed at different stations, that waited for ten long years to announce with their blazing pyramids the destruction of Troy. Coleridge had agreed to come over and see my father, according to the courtesy of the country, as Mr. Rowe's probable successor; but in the meantime, I had gone to hear him preach the Sunday after his arrival. A poet and a philosopher getting up into a Unitarian pulpit to preach the gospel was a romance in these degenerate days, a sort of revival of the primitive spirit of Christianity, which was not to be resisted.

It was in January of 1798, that I rose one morning before daylight, to walk ten miles in the mud, to hear this celebrated person preach. Never, the longest day I have to live, shall I have such another walk as this cold, raw, comfortless one, in the winter of the year 1798. *Il y a des impressions que ni le tems ni les circonstances peuvent effacer. Dussé-je vivre des siècles entiers le doux tems de ma jeunesse ne peut renaître pour moi, ni s'effacer jamais dans ma mémoire.* When I got there, the organ was playing the 100th Psalm, and when it was done, Mr. Coleridge rose and gave out his text, "And he went up into the mountain to pray, HIMSELF, ALONE." As he gave out this text, his voice "rose like a steam of rich distilled perfumes," and when he came to the two last words, which he pronounced loud, deep, and dis-

tinct, it seemed to me, who was then young, as if the sounds had echoed from the bottom of the human heart, and as if that prayer might have floated in solemn silence through the universe. The idea of St. John came into my mind, "of one crying in the wilderness, who had his loins girt about, and whose food was locusts and wild honey." The preacher then launched into his subject, like an eagle dallying with the wind. The sermon was upon peace and war; upon church and state—not their alliance, but their separation—on the spirit of the world and the spirit of Christianity, not as the same, but as opposed to one another. He talked of those who had "inscribed the cross of Christ on banners dripping with human gore." He made a poetical and pastoral excursion—and to show the fatal effects of war, drew a striking contrast between the simple shepherd-boy, driving his team afield, or sitting under the hawthorn, piping to his flock, "as though he should never be old," and the same poor country lad, crimped, kidnapped, brought into town, made drunk at an alehouse, turned into a wretched drummer-boy, with his hair sticking on end with powder and pomatum, a long cue at his back, and tricked out in the loathsome finery of the profession of blood:

"Such were the notes our once-loved poet sung."

And for myself, I could not have been more delighted if I had heard the music of the spheres. Poetry and Philosophy had met together. Truth and Genius had embraced, under the eye and with the sanction of Religion. This was even beyond my hopes. I returned home well satisfied. The sun that was still labouring pale

and wan through the sky, obscured by thick mists, seemed an emblem of the *good cause* ; and the cold dank drops of dew, that hung half melted on the beard of the thistle, had something genial and refreshing in them ; for there was a spirit of hope and youth in all nature, that turned everything into good. The face of nature had not then the brand of *JUS DIVINUM* on it :

“ Like to that sanguine flower inscrib'd with woe.”

On the Tuesday following, the half-inspired speaker came. I was called down into the room where he was, and went half-hoping, half-afraid. He received me very graciously, and I listened for a long time without uttering a word. I did not suffer in his opinion by my silence. “ For those two hours,” he afterwards was pleased to say, “ he was conversing with William Hazlitt's forehead ! ” His appearance was different from what I had anticipated from seeing him before. At a distance, and in the dim light of the chapel, there was to me a strange wildness in his aspect, a dusky obscurity, and I thought him pitted with the small-pox. His complexion was at that time clear, and even bright—

“ As are the children of yon azure sheen.”

His forehead was broad and high, light as if built of ivory, with large projecting eyebrows, and his eyes rolling beneath them, like a sea with darkened lustre. “ A certain tender bloom his face o'erspread,” a purple tinge as we see it in the pale, thoughtful complexions of the Spanish portrait-painters, Murillo and Valasquez. His mouth was gross, voluptuous, open, eloquent ; his chin good-humoured and round ; but his nose, the rud-

der of the face, the index of the will, was small, feeble, nothing—like what he has done. It might seem that the genius of his face as from a height surveyed and projected him (with sufficient capacity and huge aspiration) into the world unknown of thought and imagination, with nothing to support or guide his veering purpose, as if Columbus had launched his adventurous course for the New World in a scallop, without oars or compass. So, at least, I comment on it after the event. Coleridge, in his person, was rather above the common size, inclining to the corpulent, or like Lord Hamlet, “ somewhat fat and pursy.” His hair (now, alas ! grey) was then black and glossy as the raven’s, and fell in smooth masses over his forehead. This long pendulous hair is peculiar to enthusiasts, to those whose minds tend heavenward ; and is traditionally inseparable (though of a different colour) from the pictures of Christ. It ought to belong, as a character, to all who preach *Christ crucified*, and Coleridge was at that time one of those !

It was curious to observe the contrast between him and my father, who was a veteran in the cause, and then declining into the vale of years. He had been a poor Irish lad, carefully brought up by his parents, and sent to the University of Glasgow (where he studied under Adam Smith) to prepare him for his future destination. It was his mother’s proudest wish to see her son a Dissenting Minister. So, if we look back to past generations (as far as eye can reach), we see the same hopes, fears, wishes, followed by the same disappointments, throbbing in the human heart ; and so we may see them (if we look forward) rising up for ever, and dis-

appearing, like vapourish bubbles, in the human breast ! After being tossed about from congregation to congregation in the heats of the Unitarian controversy, and squabbles about the American war, he had been relegated to an obscure village, where he was to spend the last thirty years of his life, far from the only converse that he loved, the talk about disputed texts of Scripture, and the cause of civil and religious liberty. Here he passed his days, repining, but resigned, in the study of the Bible, and the perusal of the Commentators—huge folios, not easily got through, one of which would outlast a winter ! Why did he pore on these from morn to night (with the exception of a walk in the fields or a turn in the garden to gather broccoli-plants or kidney beans of his own rearing, with no small degree of pride and pleasure) ? Here were no “figures nor no fantasies”—neither poetry nor philosophy—nothing to dazzle, nothing to excite modern curiosity ; but to his lack-lustre eyes there appeared within the pages of the ponderous, unwieldy, neglected tomes, the sacred name of JEHOVAH in Hebrew capitals : pressed down by the weight of the style, worn to the last fading thinness of the understanding, there were glimpses, glimmering notions of the patriarchal wanderings, with palm trees hovering in the horizon, and processions of camels at the distance of three thousand years ; there was Moses with the Burning Bush, the number of the Twelve Tribes, types, shadows, glosses on the law and the prophets ; there were discussions (dull enough) on the age of Methuselah, a mighty speculation ! there were outlines, rude guesses at the shape of Noah’s Ark and of the riches of Solomon’s Temple ; questions as to the

date of the creation, predictions of the end of all things ; the great lapses of time, the strange mutations of the globe were unfolded with the voluminous leaf, as it turned over ; and though the soul might slumber with an hieroglyphic veil of inscrutable mysteries drawn over it, yet it was in a slumber ill-exchanged for all the sharpened realities of sense, wit, fancy, or reason. My father's life was comparatively a dream ; but it was a dream of infinity and eternity, of death, the resurrection, and a judgment to come !

No two individuals were ever more unlike than were the host and his guest. A poet was to my father a sort of nondescript ; yet whatever added grace to the Unitarian cause was to him welcome. He could hardly have been more surprised or pleased if our visitor had worn wings. Indeed, his thoughts had wings : and as the silken sounds rustled round our little wainscoted parlour, my father threw back his spectacles over his forehead, his white hairs mixing with its sanguine hue ; and a smile of delight beamed across his rugged, cordial face, to think that Truth had found a new ally in Fancy ! * Besides, Coleridge seemed to take considerable notice of me, and that of itself was enough. He talked very familiarly, but agreeably, and glanced over a variety of subjects. At dinner-time he grew more animated, and dilated in a very edifying manner on Mary Wolstonecraft and Mackintosh. The last, he

* My father was one of those who mistook his talent, after all. He used to be very much dissatisfied that I preferred his "Letters" to his "Sermons." The last were forced and dry ; the first came naturally from him. For ease, half-plays on words, and a supine, monkish, indolent pleasantry, I have never seen them equalled.

said, he considered (on my father's speaking of his *Vindiciæ Gallicæ* as a capital performance) as a clever, scholastic man—a master of the topics—or, as the ready warehouseman of letters, who knew exactly where to lay his hand on what he wanted, though the goods were not his own. He thought him no match for Burke, either in style or matter. Burke was a metaphysician, Mackintosh a mere logician. Burke was an orator (almost a poet) who reasoned in figures, because he had an eye for nature : Mackintosh, on the other hand, was a rhetorician, who had only an eye to commonplaces. On this I ventured to say that I had always entertained a great opinion of Burke, and that (as far as I could find) the speaking of him with contempt might be made the test of a vulgar, democratical mind. This was the first observation I ever made to Coleridge, and he said it was a very just and striking one. I remember the leg of Welsh mutton and the turnips on the table that day had the finest flavour imaginable. Coleridge added that Mackintosh and Tom Wedgwood (of whom, however, he spoke highly) had expressed a very indifferent opinion of his friend Mr. Wordsworth, on which he remarked to them—“ He strides on so far before you, that he dwindles in the distance ! ” Godwin had once boasted to him of having carried on an argument with Mackintosh for three hours with dubious success ; Coleridge told him—“ If there had been a man of genius in the room he would have settled the question in five minutes.” He asked me if I had ever seen Mary Wolstonecraft, and I said, I had once for a few moments, and that she seemed to me to turn off Godwin's objections to some-

thing she advanced with quite a playful, easy air. He replied, that "this was only one instance of the ascendancy which people of imagination exercised over those of mere intellect." He did not rate Godwin very high * (this was caprice, or prejudice, real or affected), but he had a great idea of Mrs. Wolstonecraft's powers of conversation; none at all of her talent for bookmaking. We talked a little about Holcroft. He had been asked if he was not much struck *with* him, and he said, he thought himself in more danger of being struck *by* him. I complained that he would not let me get on at all, for he required a definition of even the commonest word, exclaiming, "What do you mean by a *sensation*, Sir? What do you mean by an *idea*?" This, Coleridge said, was barricading the road to truth; it was setting up a turnpike-gate at every step we took. I forget a great number of things, many more than I remember; but the day passed off pleasantly, and the next morning Mr. Coleridge was to return to Shrewsbury. When I came down to breakfast, I found that he had just received a letter from his friend, T. Wedgwood, making him an offer of £150 a year if he chose to waive his present pursuit, and devote himself entirely to the study of poetry and philosophy. Coleridge seemed to make up his mind to close with this proposal in the act of tying on one of his shoes. It threw an additional damp on his departure. It took the wayward enthusiast quite from us to cast him into Deva's wind.

* He complained in particular of the presumption of his attempting to establish the future immortality of man, "without" (as he said) "knowing what Death was or what Life was"—and the tone in which he pronounced these two words seemed to convey a complete image of both.

ing vales, or by the shores of old romance. Instead of living at ten miles' distance, of being the pastor of a Dissenting congregation at Shrewsbury, he was henceforth to inhabit the Hill of Parnassus, to be a Shepherd on the Delectable Mountains. Alas ! I knew not the way thither, and felt very little gratitude for Mr. Wedgwood's bounty. I was presently relieved from this dilemma ; for Mr. Coleridge, asking for a pen and ink, and going to a table to write something on a bit of card, advanced towards me with undulating step, and giving me the precious document, said that that was his address, *Mr. Coleridge, Nether-Stowey, Somersetshire*, and that he should be glad to see me there in a few weeks' time, and, if I chose, would come half-way to meet me. I was not less surprised than the shepherd-boy (this simile is to be found in *Cassandra*), when he sees a thunderbolt fall close at his feet. I stammered out my acknowledgments and acceptance of this offer (I thought Mr. Wedgwood's annuity a trifle to it) as well as I could ; and this mighty business being settled, the poet preacher took leave, and I accompanied him six miles on the road. It was a fine morning in the middle of winter, and he talked the whole way. The scholar in Chaucer is described as going

—“ Sounding on his way.”

So Coleridge went on his. In digressing, in dilating, in passing from subject to subject, he appeared to me to float in air, to slide on ice. He told me in confidence (going along) that he should have preached two sermons before he accepted the situation at Shrewsbury, one on Infant Baptism, the other on the Lord's

Supper, showing that he could not administer either, which would have effectually disqualified him for the object in view. I observed that he continually crossed me on the way by shifting from one side of the footpath to the other. This struck me as an odd movement ; but I did not at that time connect it with any instability of purpose or involuntary change of principle, as I have done since. He seemed unable to keep on in a straight line. He spoke slightly of Hume (whose " Essay on Miracles " he said was stolen from an objection started in one of South's sermons—*Credat Judæus Appella !*). I was not very much pleased at this account of Hume, for I had just been reading, with infinite relish, that completest of all metaphysical *chokepears*, his " Treatise on Human Nature," to which the " Essays " in point of scholastic subtilty and close reasoning, are mere elegant trifling, light summer reading. Coleridge even denied the excellence of Hume's general style, which I think betrayed a want of taste or candour. He however made me amends by the manner in which he spoke of Berkeley. He dwelt particularly on his " Essay on Vision " as a masterpiece of analytical reasoning. So it undoubtedly is. He was exceedingly angry with Dr. Johnson for striking the stone with his foot, in allusion to this author's " Theory of Matter and Spirit," and saying, " Thus I confute him, Sir," Coleridge drew a parallel (I don't know how he brought about the connection) between Bishop Berkeley and Tom Paine. He said the one was an instance of a subtle, the other of an acute mind, than which no two things could be more distinct. The one was a shop-boy's quality, the other

the characteristic of a philosopher. He considered Bishop Butler as a true philosopher, a profound and conscientious thinker, a genuine reader of nature and his own mind. He did not speak of his "Analogy," but of his "Sermons at the Rolls' Chapel," of which I had never heard. Coleridge somehow always contrived to prefer the *unknown* to the *known*. In this instance he was right. The "Analogy" is a tissue of sophistry, of wire-drawn, theological special-pleading; the "Sermons" (with the preface to them) are in a fine vein of deep, matured reflection, a candid appeal to our observation of human nature, without pedantry and without bias. I told Coleridge I had written a few remarks, and was sometimes foolish enough to believe that I had made a discovery on the same subject (the "Natural Disinterestedness of the Human Mind")—and I tried to explain my view of it to Coleridge, who listened with great willingness, but I did not succeed in making myself understood. I sat down to the task shortly afterwards for the twentieth time, got new pens and paper, determined to make clear work of it, wrote a few meagre sentences in the skeleton style of a mathematical demonstration, stopped halfway down the second page; and, after trying in vain to pump up any words, images, notions, apprehensions, facts, or observations, from that gulf of abstraction in which I had plunged myself for four or five years preceding, gave up the attempt as labour in vain, and shed tears of helpless despondency on the blank, unfinished paper. I can write fast enough now. Am I better than I was then? Oh no! One truth discovered, one pang of regret at not being able to express it, is better than all

the fluency and flippancy in the world. Would that I could go back to what I then was ! Why can we not revive past times as we can revisit old places ? If I had the quaint Muse of Sir Philip Sidney to assist me, I would write a "Sonnet to the Road Between Wem and Shrewsbury," and immortalise every step of it by some fond enigmatical conceit. I would swear that the very milestones had ears, and that Harmer Hill stooped with all its pines, to listen to a poet, as he passed ! I remember but one other topic of discourse in this walk. He mentioned Paley, praised the naturalness and clearness of his style, but condemned his sentiments, thought him a mere time-serving casuist, and said that "the fact of his work on Moral and Political Philosophy being made a text-book in our Universities was a disgrace to the national character." We parted at the six-mile stone ; and I returned homeward, pensive, but much pleased. I had met with unexpected notice from a person whom I believed to have been prejudiced against me. "Kind and affable to me had been his condescension, and should be honoured ever with suitable regard." He was the first poet I had known, and he certainly answered to that inspired name. I had heard a great deal of his powers of conversation and was not disappointed. In fact, I never met with anything at all like them, either before or since. I could easily credit the accounts which were circulated of his holding forth to a large party of ladies and gentlemen, an evening or two before, on the Berkeleyan Theory, when he made the whole material universe look like a transparency of fine words ; and another story (which I believe he has somewhere told

himself) of his being asked to a party at Birmingham, of his smoking tobacco and going to sleep after dinner on a sofa, where the company found him, to their no small surprise, which was increased to wonder when he started up of a sudden, and rubbing his eyes, looked about him, and launched into a three hours' description of the third heaven, of which he had had a dream, very different from Mr. Southey's "Vision of Judgment," and also from that other "Vision of Judgment," which Mr. Murray, the Secretary of the Bridge-street Junta, took into his especial keeping.

On my way back I had a sound in my ears—it was the voice of Fancy; I had a light before me—it was the face of Poetry. The one still lingers there, the other has not quitted my side! Coleridge, in truth, met me half-way on the ground of philosophy, or I should not have been won over to his imaginative creed. I had an uneasy, pleasurable sensation all the time, till I was to visit him. During those months the chill breath of winter gave me a welcoming; the vernal air was balm and inspiration to me. The golden sunsets, the silver star of evening, lighted me on my way to new hopes and prospects. *I was to visit Coleridge in the spring.* This circumstance was never absent from my thoughts, and mingled with all my feelings. I wrote to him at the time proposed, and received an answer postponing my intended visit for a week or two, but very cordially urging me to complete my promise then. This delay did not damp, but rather increased, my ardour. In the meantime, I went to Llangollen Vale, by way of initiating myself in the mysteries of natural scenery; and I must say I was enchanted with it.

I had been reading Coleridge's description of England in his fine "Ode on the Departing Year," and I applied it, *con amore*, to the objects before me. That valley was to me (in a manner) the cradle of a new existence : in the river that winds through it, my spirit was baptized in the waters of Helicon !

I returned home, and soon after set out on my journey with unworn heart, and untired feet. My way lay through Worcester and Gloucester, and by Upton, where I thought of Tom Jones and the adventure of the muff. I remember getting completely wet through one day, and stopping at an inn (I think it was at Tewkesbury) where I sat up all night to read Paul and Virginia." Sweet were the showers in early youth that drenched my body, and sweet the drops of pity that fell upon the books I read ! I recollect a remark of Coleridge's upon this very book that nothing could show the gross indelicacy of French manners and the entire corruption of their imagination more strongly than the behaviour of the heroine in the last fatal scene, who turns away from a person on board the sinking vessel that offers to save her life, because he has thrown off his clothes to assist him in swimming. Was this a time to think of such a circumstance ? I once hinted to Wordsworth, as we were sailing in his boat on Grasmere lake, that I thought he had borrowed the idea of his "Poems on the Naming of Places" from the local inscriptions of the same kind in "Paul and Virginia." He did not own the obligation, and stated some distinction without a difference in defence of his claim to originality. Any, the slightest, variation would be sufficient for this purpose in his mind ; for whatever

he added or altered would inevitably be worth all that any one else had done, and contain the marrow of the sentiment. I was still two days before the time fixed for my arrival, for I had taken care to set out early enough. I stopped these two days at Bridgewater; and when I was tired of sauntering on the banks of its muddy river, returned to the inn and read "Camilla." So have I loitered my life away, reading books, looking at pictures, going to plays, hearing, thinking, writing on what pleased me best. I have wanted only one thing to make me happy; but wanting that have wanted everything!

I arrived, and was well received. The country about Nether Stowey is beautiful, green and hilly, and near the sea-shore. I saw it but the other day, after an interval of twenty years, from a hill near Taunton. How was the map of my life spread out before me, as the map of the country lay at my feet! In the afternoon, Coleridge took me over to All-Foxden, a romantic old family mansion of the St. Aubins, where Wordsworth lived. It was then in the possession of a friend of the poet's, who gave him the free use of it. Somehow, that period (the time just after the French Revolution) was not a time when *nothing was given for nothing*. The mind opened and a softness might be perceived coming over the heart of individuals, beneath "the scales that fence" our self-interest. Wordsworth himself was from home, but his sister kept house, and set before us a frugal repast; and we had free access to her brother's poems, the "Lyrical Ballads," which were still in manuscript, or in the form of "Sybilline Leaves." I dipped into a few of these with great

satisfaction, and with the faith of a novice. I slept that night in an old room with blue hangings, and covered with the round-faced family portraits of the age of George I. and II., and from the wooded declivity of the adjoining park that overlooked my window, at the dawn of day, could

—"hear the loud stag speak."

In the outset of life (and particularly at this time I felt it so) our imagination has a body to it. We are in a state between sleeping and waking, and have indistinct but glorious glimpses of strange shapes, and there is always something to come better than what we see. As in our dreams the fulness of the blood gives warmth and reality to the coinage of the brain, so in youth our ideas are clothed, and fed, and pampered with our good spirits; we breathe thick with thoughtless happiness, the weight of future years presses on the strong pulses of the heart, and we repose with undisturbed faith in truth and good. As we advance, we exhaust our fund of enjoyment and of hope. We are no longer wrapped in *lamb's-wool*, lulled in Elysium. As we taste the pleasures of life, their spirit evaporates, the sense palls; and nothing is left but the phantoms, the lifeless shadows of what *has been*!

That morning, as soon as breakfast was over, we strolled out into the park, and seating ourselves on the trunk of an old ash tree that stretched along the ground, Coleridge read aloud, with a sonorous and musical voice, the ballad of "Betty Foy." I was not critically or sceptically inclined. I saw touches of truth and nature, and took the rest for granted. But in the

"Thorn," the "Mad Mother," and the "Complaint of a Poor Indian Woman," I felt that deeper power and pathos which have been since acknowledged,

"In spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,"

as the characteristics of this author ; and the sense of a new style and a new spirit in poetry came over me. It had to me something of the effect that arises from the turning up of the fresh soil, or of the first welcome breath of Spring :

"While yet the trembling year is unconfirmed."

Coleridge and myself walked back to Stowey that evening, and his voice sounded high

"Of Providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate,
Fix'd fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute,"

as we passed through echoing grove, by fairy stream or waterfall, gleaming in the summer moonlight ! He lamented that Wordsworth was not prone enough to believe in the traditional superstitions of the place, and that there was a something corporeal, a *matter-of-fact-ness*, a clinging to the palpable, or often to the petty, in his poetry, in consequence. His genius was not a spirit that descended to him through the air ; it sprung out of the ground like a flower, or unfolded itself from a green spray, on which the goldfinch sang. He said, however (if I remember right), that this objection must be confined to his descriptive pieces, that his philosophic poetry had a grand and comprehensive spirit in it, so that his soul seemed to inhabit the universe like a palace, and to discover truth by intuition, rather than by deduction. The next day Wordsworth

arrived from Bristol at Coleridge's cottage. I think I see him now. He answered in some degree to his friend's description of him, but was more gaunt and Don Quixote-like. He was quaintly dressed (according to the *costume* of that unconstrained period) in a brown fustian jacket and striped pantaloons. There was something of a roll, a lounge in his gait, not unlike his own "Peter Bell." There was a severe, worn pressure of thought about his temples, a fire in his eye (as if he saw something in objects more than the outward appearance), an intense, high, narrow forehead, a Roman nose, cheeks furrowed by strong purpose and feeling, and a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth, a good deal at variance with the solemn, stately expression of the rest of his face. Chantrey's bust wants the marking traits; but he was teased into making it regular and heavy: Haydon's head of him, introduced into the "Entrance of Christ into Jerusalem," is the most like his drooping weight of thought and expression. He sat down and talked very naturally and freely, with a mixture of clear, gushing accents in his voice, a deep guttural intonation, and a strong tincture of the northern *burr*, like the crust on wine. He instantly began to make havoc of the half of a Cheshire cheese on the table, and said, triumphantly, that "his marriage with experience had not been so productive as Mr. Southey's in teaching him a knowledge of the good things of this life." He had been to see the "Castle Spectre" by Monk Lewis, while at Bristol, and described it very well. He said "it fitted the taste of the audience like a glove," This *ad captandum* merit was however by no means a recommenda-

tion of it, according to the severe principles of the new school, which reject rather than court popular effect. Wordsworth, looking out of the low, latticed window, said, "How beautifully the sun sets on that yellow bank!" I thought within myself, "With what eyes these poets see nature!" and ever after, when I saw the sun-set stream upon the objects facing it, conceived I had made a discovery, or thanked Mr. Wordsworth for having made one for me! We went over to All-Foxden again the day following, and Wordsworth read us the story of "Peter Bell" in the open air; and the comment upon it by his face and voice was very different from that of some later critics! Whatever might be thought of the poem, "his face was as a book where men might read strange matters," and he announced the fate of his hero in prophetic tones. There is a *chaunt* in the recitation both of Coleridge and Wordsworth, which acts as a spell upon the hearer, and disarms the judgment. Perhaps they have deceived themselves by making habitual use of this ambiguous accompaniment. Coleridge's manner is more full, animated, and varied; Wordsworth's more equable, sustained, and internal. The one might be termed more *dramatic*, the other more *lyrical*. Coleridge has told me that he himself liked to compose in walking over uneven ground, or breaking through the straggling branches of a copse-wood; whereas Wordsworth always wrote (if he could) walking up and down a straight gravel walk, or in some spot where the continuity of his verse met with no collateral interruption. Returning that same evening, I got into a metaphysical argument with Wordsworth, while Coleridge

was explaining the different notes of the nightingale to his sister, in which we neither of us succeeded in making ourselves perfectly clear and intelligible. Thus I passed three weeks at Nether Stowey and in the neighbourhood, generally devoting the afternoons to a delightful chat in an arbour made of bark by the poet's friend Tom Poole, sitting under two fine elm trees, and listening to the bees humming round us, while we quaffed our *flip*. It was agreed, among other things, that we should make a jaunt down the Bristol Channel, as far as Linton. We set off together on foot, Coleridge, John Chester, and I. This Chester was a native of Nether Stowey, one of those who were attracted to Coleridge's discourse as flies are to honey, or bees in swarming-time to the sound of a brass pan. He "followed in the chase like a dog who hunts, not like one that made up the cry." He had on a brown cloth coat, boots, and corduroy breeches, was low in stature, bow-legged, had a drag in his walk like a drover, which he assisted by a hazel switch, and kept on a sort of trot by the side of Coleridge, like a running footman by a state coach, that he might not lose a syllable or sound that fell from Coleridge's lips. He told me his private opinion that Coleridge was a wonderful man. He scarcely opened his lips, much less offered an opinion the whole way ; yet of the three, had I to choose during that journey, I would be John Chester. He afterwards followed Coleridge into Germany, where the Kantian philosophers were puzzled how to bring him under any of their categories. When he sat down at table with his idol, John's felicity was complete ; Sir Walter Scott's, or Mr. Blackwood's, when they sat down at

the same table with the King, was not more so. We passed Dunster on our right, a small town between the brow of a hill and the sea. I remember eyeing it wistfully as it lay below us : contrasted with the woody scene around, it looked as clear, as pure, as *embrowned* and ideal as any landscape I have seen since of Gaspar Poussin's or Domenichino's. We had a long day's march (our feet kept time to the echoes of Coleridge's tongue) through Minehead and by the Blue Anchor, and on to Linton, which we did not reach till near midnight, and where we had some difficulty in making a lodgment. We, however, knocked the people of the house up at last, and we were repaid for our apprehensions and fatigue by some excellent rashers of fried bacon and eggs. The view in coming along had been splendid. We walked for miles and miles in dark brown heaths overlooking the Channel, with the Welsh hills beyond, and at times descended into little sheltered valleys close by the seaside, with a smuggler's face scowling by us, and then had to ascend conical hills with a path winding up through a coppice to a barren top, like a monk's shaven crown, from one of which I pointed out to Coleridge's notice the bare masts of a vessel on the very edge of the horizon, and within the red-orbed disk of the setting sun, like his own spectre-ship in the "Ancient Mariner." At Linton the character of the sea-coast becomes more marked and rugged. There is a place called the *Valley of Rocks* (I suspect this was only the poetical name for it), bedded among precipices overhanging the sea, with rocky caverns beneath, into which the waves dash, and where the sea-gull for ever wheels its screaming flight.

On the tops of these are huge stones thrown transverse, as if an earthquake had tossed them there, and behind these is a fretwork of perpendicular rocks, something like the "Giant's Causeway." A thunder-storm came on while we were at the inn, and Coleridge was running out bare-headed to enjoy the commotion of the elements in the "Valley of Rocks," but, as if in spite, the clouds only muttered a few angry sounds, and let fall a few refreshing drops. Coleridge told me that he and Wordsworth were to have made this place the scene of a prose-tale, which was to have been in the manner of, but far superior to, the "Death of Abel," but they had relinquished the design. In the morning of the second day, we breakfasted luxuriously in an old-fashioned parlour on tea, toast, eggs, and honey, in the very sight of the bee-hives from which it had been taken, and a garden full of thyme and wild flowers that had produced it. On this occasion Coleridge spoke of Virgil's "Georgics," but not well. I do not think he had much feeling for the classical or elegant.* It was in this room that we found a little worn-out copy of the "Seasons," lying in a window-seat, on which Coleridge exclaimed, "*That* is true fame!" He said Thomson was a great poet, rather than a good one; his style was as meretricious as his thoughts were

* He had no idea of pictures, of Claude or Raphael, and at this time I had as little as he. He sometimes gives a striking account at present of the Cartoons at Pisa by Buffamalco and others; of one in particular, where Death is seen in the air brandishing his scythe, and the great and mighty of the earth shudder at his approach, while the beggars and the wretched kneel to him as their deliverer. He would, of course, understand so broad and fine a moral as this at any time.

natural. He spoke of Cowper as the best modern poet. He said the "Lyrical Ballads" were an experiment about to be tried by him and Wordsworth, to see how far the public taste would endure poetry written in a more natural and simple style than had hitherto been attempted; totally discarding the artifices of poetical diction, and making use only of such words as had probably been common in the most ordinary language since the days of Henry II. Some comparison was introduced between Shakspeare and Milton. He said "he hardly knew which to prefer. Shakspeare appeared to him a mere stripling in the art; he was as tall and as strong, with infinitely more activity than Milton, but he never appeared to have come to man's estate; or if he had, he would not have been a man, but a monster." He spoke with contempt of Gray, and with intolerance of Pope. He did not like the versification of the latter. He observed that "the ears of these couplet-writers might be charged with having short memories, that could not retain the harmony of whole passages." He thought little of Junius as a writer; he had a dislike of Dr. Johnson; and a much higher opinion of Burke as an orator and politician, than of Fox or Pitt. He, however, thought him very inferior in richness of style and imagery to some of our elder prose-writers, particularly Jeremy Taylor. He liked Richardson, but not Fielding; nor could I get him to enter into the merits of "Caleb Williams." In short, he was profound and discriminating with respect to those authors whom he liked, and where he gave his judgment fair play; capricious, perverse, and prejudiced in his antipathies and distastes.

We loitered on the "ribbed sea-sands," in such talk as this a whole morning, and, I recollect, met with a curious seaweed, of which John Chester told us the country name! A fisherman gave Coleridge an account of a boy that had been drowned the day before, and that they had tried to save him at the risk of their own lives. He said "he did not know how it was that they ventured, but, Sir, we have a *nature* towards one another." This expression, Coleridge remarked to me, was a fine illustration of that theory of disinterestedness which I (in common with Butler) had adopted. I broached to him an argument of mine to prove that *likeness* was not mere association of ideas. I said that the mark in the sand put one in mind of a man's foot, not because it was part of a former impression of a man's foot (for it was quite new), but because it was like the shape of a man's foot. He assented to the justness of this distinction (which I have explained at length elsewhere, for the benefit of the curious) and John Chester listened; not from any interest in the subject, but because he was astonished that I should be able to suggest anything to Coleridge that he did not already know. We returned on the third morning, and Coleridge remarked the silent cottage-smoke curling up the valleys where, a few evenings before, we had seen the lights gleaming through the dark.

In a day or two after we arrived at Stowey, we set out, I on my return home, and he for Germany. It was a Sunday morning, and he was to preach that day for Dr. Toulmin of Taunton. I asked him if he had prepared anything for the occasion? He said he had not even thought of the text, but should as soon as we

parted. I did not go to hear him—this^{*} was a fault—but we met in the evening at Bridgewater. The next day we had a long day's walk to Bristol, and sat down, I recollect, by a well-side on the road, to cool ourselves and satisfy our thirst, when Coleridge repeated to me some descriptive lines of his tragedy of "Remorse"; which I must say became his mouth and that occasion better than they, some years after, did Mr. Elliston's and the Drury-lane boards—

"Oh memory! shield me from the world's poor strife,
And give those scenes thine everlasting life."

I saw no more of him for a year or two, during which period he had been wandering in the Hartz Forest, in Germany; and his return was cometary, meteorous, unlike his setting out. It was not till some time after that I knew his friends Lamb and Southey. The last always appears to me (as I first saw him) with a commonplace book under his arm, and the first with a *bon-mot* in his mouth. It was at Godwin's that I met him with Holcroft and Coleridge, where they were disputing fiercely which was the best—*Man as he was, or man as he is to be*. "Give me," says Lamb, "man as he is *not* to be." This saying was the beginning of a friendship between us, which I believe still continues. Enough of this for the present.

"But there is matter for another rhyme,
And I to this may add a second tale."

II.

OF PERSONS ONE WOULD WISH TO HAVE SEEN.

“Come like shadows—so depart.”

LAMB it was, I think, who suggested this subject, as well as the defence of Guy Faux, which I urged him to execute. As, however, he would undertake neither, I suppose I must do both, a task for which he would have been much fitter, no less from the temerity than the felicity of his pen—

“Never so sure our rapture to create
As when it touch'd the brink of all we hate.”

Compared with him, I shall, I fear, make but a commonplace piece of business of it ; but I should be loth the idea was entirely lost, and besides I may avail myself of some hints of his in the progress of it. I am sometimes, I suspect, a better reporter of the ideas of other people than expounder of my own. I pursue the one too far into paradox or mysticism ; the others I am not bound to follow farther than I like, or than seems fair and reasonable.

On the question being started, Ayrton said, “I suppose the two first persons you would choose to see would be the two greatest names in English literature, Sir Isaac Newton and Mr. Locke ?” In this Ayrton, as usual, reckoned without his host. Every one burst

out a laughing at the expression of Lamb's face, in which impatience was restrained by courtesy. "Yes, the greatest names," he stammered out hastily, "but they were not persons—not persons." "Not persons?" said Ayrton, looking wise and foolish at the same time, afraid his triumph might be premature. "That is," rejoined Lamb, "not characters, you know. By Mr. Locke and Sir Isaac Newton, you mean the 'Essay on the Human Understanding,' and the 'Principia,' which we have to this day. Beyond their contents there is nothing personally interesting in the men. But what we want to see any one *bodily* for, is when there is something peculiar, striking in the individuals, more than we can learn from their writings, and yet are curious to know. I dare say Locke and Newton were very like Kneller's portraits of them. But who could paint Shakspeare?"—"Ay," retorted Ayrton, "there it is; then I suppose you would prefer seeing him and Milton instead?"—"No," said Lamb, "neither. I have seen so much of Shakspeare on the stage and on bookstalls, in frontispieces and on mantel-pieces, that I am quite tired of the everlasting repetition; and as to Milton's face, the impressions that have come down to us of it I do not like; it is too starched and puritanical; and I should be afraid of losing some of the manna of his poetry in the leaven of his countenance and the precisian's band and gown."—"I shall guess no more," said Ayrton. "Who is it, then, you would like to see 'in his habit as he lived,' if you had your choice of the whole range of English literature?" Lamb then named Sir Thomas Browne and Fulke Greville, the friend of Sir Philip Sidney, as

the two worthies whom he should feel the greatest pleasure to encounter on the floor of his apartment in their nightgowns and slippers, and to exchange friendly greeting with them. At this Ayrton laughed outright, and conceived Lamb was jesting with him ; but as no one followed his example, he thought there might be something in it, and waited for an explanation in a state of whimsical suspense. Lamb then (as well as I can remember a conversation that passed twenty years ago—how time slips !) went on as follows. “ The reason why I pitch upon these two authors is, that their writings are riddles, and they themselves the most mysterious of personages. They resemble the sooth-sayers of old, who ‘dealt in dark hints and doubtful oracles ; and I should like to ask them the meaning of what no mortal but themselves, I should suppose, can fathom. There is Dr. Johnson : I have no curiosity, no strange uncertainty about him ; he and Boswell together have pretty well let me into the secret of what passed through his mind. He and other writers like him are sufficiently explicit : my friends whose repose I should be tempted to disturb (were it in my power), are implicit, inextricable, inscrutable.

“ When I look at that obscure but gorgeous prose composition the ‘ Urn-burial,’ I seem to myself to look into a deep abyss, at the bottom of which are hid pearls and rich treasure ; or it is like a stately labyrinth of doubt and withering speculation, and I would invoke the spirit of the author to lead me through it. Besides, who would not be curious to see the lineaments of a man who, having himself been twice married, wished that mankind were propagated like trees ! As to Fulke

Greville, he is like nothing but one of his own 'Prologues spoken by the ghost of an old king of Ormus,' a truly formidable and inviting personage; his style is apocalyptical, cabalistical, a knot worthy of such an apparition to untie; and for the unravelling a passage or two, I would stand the brunt of an encounter with so portentous a commentator!"—"I am afraid, in that case," said Ayrton, "that if the mystery were once cleared up, the merit might be lost"; and, turning to me, whispered a friendly apprehension, that while Lamb continued to admire these old crabbed authors, he would never become a popular writer. Dr. Donne was mentioned as a writer of the same period, with a very interesting countenance, whose history was singular, and whose meaning was often quite as *uncomeatable*, without a personal citation from the dead, as that of any of his contemporaries. The volume was produced; and while some one was expatiating on the exquisite simplicity and beauty of the portrait prefixed to the old edition, Ayrton got hold of the poetry, and exclaiming, "What have we here?" read the following:

"Here lies a She-Sun and a He-Moon there—
 She gives the best light to his sphear,
 Or each is both, and all, and so
 They unto one another nothing owe."

There was no resisting this, till Lamb, seizing the volume, turned to the beautiful "Lines to His Mistress," dissuading her from accompanying him abroad, and read them with suffused features and a faltering tongue:

"By our first strange and fatal interview,
 By all desires which thereof did ensue,

By our long starving hopes, by that remorse
Which my words' masculine perswasive force
Begot in thee, and by the memory
Of hurts, which spies and rivals threatned me,
I calmly beg. But by thy father's wrath,
By all paines which want and divorcement hath,
I conjure thee; and all the oathes which I
And thou have sworne to seale joynt constancy
Here I unswear, and overswear them thus—
Thou shalt not love by wayes so dangerous.
Temper, O fair love! love's impetuous rage,
Be my true mistris still, not my fain'd Page;
I'll goe, and, by thy kinde leave, leave behinde
Thee! onely worthy to nurse in my minde.
Thirst to come backe; O, if thou die before,
My soule, from other lands to thee shall soare.
Thy (else almighty) beauty cannot move
Rage from the seas, nor thy love teach them love.
Nor tame wild Boreas' harshnesse; thou hast reade
How roughly hee in pieces shivered
Fair Orithea, whom he swore he lov'd.
Fall ill or good, 'tis madnesse to have prov'd
Dangers unurg'd: Feed on this flattery,
That absent lovers one in th' other be.
Dissemble nothing, not a boy; nor change
Thy bodie's habite, nor minde; be not strange
To thyselfe onely. All will spie in thy face
A blushing, womanly, discovering grace.
Richly-cloath'd apes are call'd apes, and as soone
Eclips'd as bright, we call the moone the moon.
Men of France, changeable camelions,
Spittles of diseases, shops of fashions,
Love's fuellers, and the rightest company
Of players, which upon the world's stage be,
Will quickly know thee . . .
O stay here! for for thee
England is onely a worthy gallerie,
To walke in expectation; till from thence
Our greatest King call thee to his presence.
When I am gone, dreame me some happinesse,
Nor let thy lookes our long-hid love confesse,
Nor praise, nor dispraise me; nor blesse, nor curse
Openly love's force, nor in bed fright thy nurse
With midnight's startings, crying out, Oh, oh,
Nurse, oh, my love is slaine, I saw him goe

O'er the white Alpes alone; I saw him, I,
Assail'd, fight, taken, stabb'd, bleed, fall, and die.
Augure me better chance, except dread Jove
Thinke it enough for me to have had thy love."

Some one then inquired of Lamb if we could not see from the window the Temple walk in which Chaucer used to take his exercise ; and on his name being put to the vote, I was pleased to find that there was a general sensation in his favour in all but Ayrton, who said something about the ruggedness of the metre, and even objected to the quaintness of the orthography. I was vexed at this superficial gloss, pertinaciously reducing everything to its own trite level, and asked " if he did not think it would be worth while to scan the eye that had first greeted the Muse in that dim twilight and early dawn of English literature ; to see the head round which the visions of fancy must have played like gleams of inspiration or a sudden glory ; to watch those lips that ' lisped in numbers, for the numbers came ' —as by a miracle, or as if the dumb should speak ? Nor was it alone that he had been the first to tune his native tongue (however imperfectly to modern ears) ; but he was himself a noble, manly character, standing before his age and striving to advance it ; a pleasant humourist withal, who has not only handed down to us the living manners of his time, but had, no doubt, store of curious and quaint devices, and would make as hearty a companion as mine Host of the Tabard. His interview with Petrarch is fraught with interest. Yet I would rather have seen Chaucer in company with the author of the ' Decameron,' and have heard them exchange their best stories together

—the ‘Squire’s Tale’ against the ‘Story of the Falcon,’ the ‘Wife of Bath’s Prologue’ against the ‘Adventures of Friar Albert.’ How fine to see the high mysterious brow which learning then wore, relieved by the gay, familiar tone of men of the world, and by the courtesies of genius ! Surely, the thought and feelings which passed through the minds of these great revivers of learning, these Cadmuses who sowed the teeth of letters, must have stamped an expression on their features as different from the moderns as their books, and well worth the perusal. Dante,” I continued, “is as interesting a person as his own Ugolino, one whose lineaments curiosity would as eagerly devour in order to penetrate his spirit, and the only one of the Italian poets I should care much to see. There is a fine portrait of Ariosto by no less a hand than Titian’s; light, Moorish, spirited, but not answering our idea. The same artist’s large colossal profile of Peter Aretine is the only likeness of the kind that has the effect of conversing with ‘the mighty dead’; and this is truly spectral, ghastly, necromantic.” Lamb put it to me if I should like to see Spenser as well as Chaucer; and I answered, without hesitation, “No; for that his beauties were ideal, visionary, not palpable or personal, and therefore connected with less curiosity about the man. His poetry was the essence of romance, a very halo round the bright orb of fancy; and the bringing in the individual might dissolve the charm. No tones of voice could come up to the mellifluous cadence of his verse; no form but of a winged angel could vie with the airy shapes he has described. He was (to my apprehension) rather a ‘creature of the element, that lived in the rain-

bow and played in the plighted clouds,' than an ordinary mortal. Or if he did appear, I should wish it to be as a mere vision, like one of his own pageants, and that he should pass by unquestioned like a dream or sound—

— ' *That* was Arion crown'd :
So went he playing on the wat'ry plain.' ”

Captain Burney muttered something about Columbus, and Martin Burney hinted at the Wandering Jew ; but the last was set aside as spurious, and the first made over to the New World.

“ I should like,” said Mrs. Reynolds, “ to have seen Pope talk with Patty Blount ; and I *have* seen Goldsmith.” Every one turned round to look at Mrs. Reynolds, as if by so doing they could get a sight of Goldsmith.

“ Where,” asked a harsh, croaking voice, “ was Dr. Johnson in the years 1745-6 ? He did not write anything that we know of, nor is there any account of him in Boswell during those two years. Was he in Scotland with the Pretender ? He seems to have passed through the scenes in the Highlands in company with Boswell, many years after, ‘ with lack-lustre eye,’ yet as if they were familiar to him, or associated in his mind with interests that he durst not explain. If so, it would be an additional reason for my liking him ; and I would give something to have seen him seated in the tent with the youthful Majesty of Britain, and penning the Proclamation to all true subjects and adherents of the legitimate Government.”

“ I thought,” said Ayrton, turning short round upon Lamb, “ that you of the Lake School did not like

Pope ? ” “ Not like Pope ! My dear sir, you must be under a mistake—I can read him over and over for ever ! ” — “ Why, certainly, the ‘ Essay on Man ’ must be allowed to be a masterpiece.”—“ It may be so, but I seldom look into it.”—“ Oh ! then it’s his Satires you admire ? ”—“ No, not his Satires, but his friendly Epistles and his compliments.”—“ Compliments ! I did not know he ever made any.”—“ The finest,” said Lamb, “ that were ever paid by the wit of man. Each of them is worth an estate for life—nay, is an immortality. There is that superb one to Lord Cornbury :

‘ Despise low joys, low gains;
Disdain whatever Cornbury disdains;
Be virtuous, and be happy for your pains.’

Was there ever more artful insinuation of idolatrous praise ? And then that noble apotheosis of his friend Lord Mansfield (however little deserved), when, speaking of the House of Lords, he adds :

‘ Conspicuous scene ! another yet is nigh,
(More silent far) where kings and poets lie;
Where Murray (long enough his country’s pride)
Shall be no more than Tully or than Hyde.’

And with what a fine turn of indignant flattery he addresses Lord Bolingbroke :

‘ Why rail then, if but one wreath of mine,
Oh ! all accomplish’d St. John, deck thy shrine ? ’

Or turn,” continued Lamb, with a slight hectic on his cheek and his eye glistening, “ to his list of early friends :

‘ But why then publish ? Granville the polite,
And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write;

Well-natured Garth inflamed with early praise,
 And Congreve loved, and Swift endured my lays:
 The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield read,
 Ev'n mitred Rochester would nod the head;
 And St. John's self (great Dryden's friend before)
 Received with open arms one poet more.
 Happy my studies, if by these approved!
 Happier their author, if by these beloved!
 From these the world will judge of men and books,
 Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cooks.'"

Here his voice totally failed him, and throwing down the book, he said, "Do you think I would not wish to have been friends with such a man as this?"

"What say you to Dryden?"—"He rather made a show of himself, and courted popularity in that lowest temple of fame, a coffee-shop, so as in some measure to vulgarise one's idea of him. Pope, on the contrary, reached the very *beau idéal* of what a poet's life should be; and his fame while living seemed to be an emanation from that which was to circle his name after death. He was so far enviable (and one would feel proud to have witnessed the rare spectacle in him) that he was almost the only poet and man of genius who met with his reward on this side of the tomb, who realised in friends, fortune, the esteem of the world, the most sanguine hopes of a youthful ambition, and who found that sort of patronage from the great during his lifetime which they would be thought anxious to bestow upon him after his death. Read Gay's verses to him on his supposed return from Greece, after his translation of Homer was finished, and say if you would not gladly join the bright procession that welcomed him home, or see it once more land at Whitehall stairs."—"Still," said Mrs. Reynolds, "I would rather have seen him

talking with Patty Blount, or riding by in a coronet-coach with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu ! ”

Erasmus Phillips, who was deep in a game of piquet at the other end of the room, whispered to Martin Burney to ask if Junius would not be a fit person to invoke from the dead. “ Yes,” said Lamb, “ provided he would agree to lay aside his mask.”

We were now at a stand for a short time, when Fielding was mentioned as a candidate ; only one, however, seconded the proposition. “ Richardson ? ” — “ By all means, but only to look at him through the glass door of his back shop, hard at work upon one of his novels (the most extraordinary contrast that ever was presented between an author and his works) ; not to let him come behind his counter, lest he should want you to turn customer, or to go upstairs with him, lest he should offer to read the first manuscript of Sir Charles Grandison, which was originally written in eight-and-twenty volumes octavo, or get out the letters of his female correspondents, to prove that Joseph Andrews was low.”

There was but one statesman in the whole of English history that any one expressed the least desire to see— Oliver Cromwell, with his fine, frank, rough, pimply face, and wily policy ; and one enthusiast, John Bunyan, the immortal author of the “ Pilgrim’s Progress.” It seemed that if he came into the room, dreams would follow him, and that each person would nod under his golden cloud, “ nigh-sphered in heaven,” a canopy as strange and stately as any in Homer.

Of all persons near our own time, Garrick’s name was received with the greatest enthusiasm, who was pro-

posed by Barron Field. He presently superseded both Hogarth and Handel, who had been talked of, but then it was on condition that he should act in tragedy and comedy, in the play and the farce, *Lear* and *Wildair* and *Abel Drugger*. What a *sight for sore eyes* that would be ! Who would not part with a year's income at least, almost with a year of his natural life, to be present at it ? Besides, as he could not act alone, and recitations are unsatisfactory things, what a troop he must bring with him—the silver-tongued Barry, and Quin, and Shuter and Weston, and Mrs. Clive and Mrs. Pritchard, of whom I have heard my father speak as so great a favourite when he was young. This would indeed be a revival of the dead, the restoring of art ; and so much the more desirable, as such is the lurking scepticism mingled with our overstrained admiration of past excellence, that though we have the speeches of Burke, the portraits of Reynolds, the writings of Goldsmith, and the conversation of Johnson, to show what people could do at that period, and to confirm the universal testimony to the merits of Garrick ; yet, as it was before our time, we have our misgivings, as if he was probably, after all, little better than a Bartlemy-fair actor, dressed out to play *Macbeth* in a scarlet coat and laced cocked-hat. For one, I should like to have seen and heard with my own eyes and ears. Certainly, by all accounts, if any one was ever moved by the true histrionic *æstus*, it was Garrick. When he followed the Ghost in *Hamlet*, he did not drop the sword, as most actors do, behind the scenes, but kept the point raised the whole way round, so fully was he possessed with the idea, or so anxious not to lose sight of his part

for a moment. Once at a splendid dinner-party at Lord ——'s, they suddenly missed Garrick, and could not imagine what was become of him, till they were drawn to the window by the convulsive screams and peals of laughter of a young negro boy, who was rolling on the ground in an ecstasy of delight to see Garrick mimicking a turkey-cock in the courtyard, with his coat-tail stuck out behind, and in a seeming flutter of feathered rage and pride. Of our party only two persons present had seen the British Roscius ; and they seemed as willing as the rest to renew their acquaintance with their old favourite.

We were interrupted in the heyday and mid-career of this fanciful speculation, by a grumbler in a corner, who declared it was a shame to make all this rout about a mere player and farce-writer, to the neglect and exclusion of the fine old dramatists, the contemporaries and rivals of Shakspeare. Lamb said he had anticipated this objection when he had named the author of *Mustapha* and *Alaham* ; and, out of caprice, insisted upon keeping him to represent the set, in preference to the wild, hare-brained enthusiast, Kit Marlowe ; to the sexton of St. Ann's, Webster, with his melancholy yew-trees and death's-heads ; to Decker, who was but a garrulous proser ; to the voluminous Heywood ; and even to Beaumont and Fletcher, whom we might offend by complimenting the wrong author on their joint productions. Lord Brooke, on the contrary, stood quite by himself, or, in Cowley's words, was " a vast species alone." Some one hinted at the circumstance of his being a lord, which rather startled Lamb, but he said a *ghost* would perhaps dis-

pense with strict etiquette, on being regularly addressed by his title. Ben Jonson divided our suffrages pretty equally. Some were afraid he would begin to traduce Shakspeare, who was not present to defend himself. "If he grows disagreeable," it was whispered aloud, "there is Godwin can match him." At length, his romantic visit to Drummond of Hawthornden was mentioned, and turned the scale in his favour.

Lamb inquired if there was any one that was hanged that I would choose to mention? And I answered, Eugene Aram. The name of the "*Admirable Crichton*" was suddenly started as a splendid example of *waste* talents, so different from the generality of his countrymen. This choice was mightily approved by a North-Briton present, who declared himself descended from that prodigy of learning and accomplishment, and said he had family plate in his possession as vouchers for the fact, with the initials A. C.—*Admirable Crichton*! Hunt laughed, or rather roared, as heartily at this as I should think he has done for many years.

The last-named Mitre-courtier * then wished to know whether there were any metaphysicians to whom one might be tempted to apply the wizard spell? I replied, there were only six in modern times deserving the name—Hobbes, Berkeley, Butler, Hartley, Hume, Leibnitz; and perhaps Jonathan Edwards, a Massachusetts man.† As to the French, who talked fluently

* Lamb at this time occupied chambers in Mitre Court, Temple.

† Bacon is not included in this list, nor do I know where he should come in. It is not easy to make room for him

of having *created* this science, there was not a tittle in any of their writings that was not to be found literally in the authors I had mentioned. [Horne Tooke, who might have a claim to come in under the head of Grammar, was still living.] None of these names seemed to excite much interest, and I did not plead for the re-appearance of those who might be thought best fitted by the abstracted nature of their studies for the present spiritual and disembodied state, and who, even while on this living stage, were nearly divested of common flesh and blood. As Ayrton, with an uneasy, fidgety face, was about to put some question about Mr. Locke and Dugald Stewart, he was prevented by Martin Burney, who observed, "If J—— was here, he would undoubtedly be for having up those profound and redoubted socialists, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus." I said this might be fair enough in him who had read, or fancied he had read, the original works, but I did not see how we could have any right to call up these authors to give an account of themselves in person, till we had looked into their writings.

By this time it should seem that some rumour of our whimsical deliberation had got wind, and had disturbed the *irritable genus* in their shadowy abodes,

and his reputation together. This great and celebrated man in some of his works recommends it to pour a bottle of claret into the ground of a morning, and to stand over it, inhaling the perfumes. So he sometimes enriched the dry and barren soil of speculation with the fine aromatic spirit of his genius. His "Essays" and his "Advancement of Learning" are works of vast depth and scope of observation. The last, though it contains no positive discoveries, is a noble chart of the human intellect, and a guide to all future inquirers.

for we received messages from several candidates that we had just been thinking of. Gray declined our invitation, though he had not yet been asked; Gay offered to come, and bring in his hand the Duchess of Bolton, the original Polly; Steele and Addison left their cards as Captain Sentry and Sir Roger de Coverley; Swift came in and sat down without speaking a word, and quitted the room as abruptly; Otway and Chatterton were seen lingering on the opposite side of the Styx, but could not muster enough between them to pay Charon his fare; Thomson fell asleep in the boat, and was rowed back again; and Burns sent a low fellow, one John Barleycorn, an old companion of his, who had conducted him to the other world, to say that he had during his lifetime been drawn out of his retirement as a show, only to be made an exciseman of, and that he would rather remain where he was. He desired, however, to shake hands by his representative—the hand, thus held out, was in a burning fever, and shook prodigiously.

The room was hung round with several portraits of eminent painters. While we were debating whether we should demand speech with these masters of mute eloquence, whose features were so familiar to us, it seemed that all at once they glided from their frames, and seated themselves at some little distance from us. There was Leonardo, with his majestic beard and watchful eye, having a bust of Archimedes before him; next him was Raphael's graceful head turned round to the Fornarina; and on his other side was Lucretia Borgia, with calm, golden locks; Michael Angelo had placed the model of St. Peter's on the table before him; Correggio had

an angel at his side ; Titian was seated with his mistress between himself and Giorgione ; Guido was accompanied by his own Aurora, who took a dice-box from him ; Claude held a mirror in his hand ; Rubens patted a beautiful panther (led in by a satyr) on the head ; Vandyke appeared as his own Paris, and Rembrandt was hid under firs, gold chains, and jewels, which Sir Joshua eyed closely, holding his hand so as to shade his forehead. Not a word was spoken ; and as we rose to do them homage, they still presented the same surface to the view. Not being *bonâ-fide* representations of living people, we got rid of the splendid apparitions by signs and dumb show. As soon as they had melted into thin air, there was a loud noise at the outer door, and we found it was Giotto, Cimabue, and Ghirlandaio, who had been raised from the dead by their earnest desire to see their illustrious successors—

“ Whose names on earth
In Fame's eternal records live for aye ! ”

Finding them gone, they had no ambition to be seen after them, and mournfully withdrew. “ Egad ! ” said Lamb, “ these are the very fellows I should like to have had some talk with, to know how they could see to paint when all was dark around them.”

“ But shall we have nothing to say,” interrogated G. J——, “ to the ‘ Legend of Good Women ’ ? ”—“ Name, name, Mr. J——,” cried Hunt in a boisterous tone of friendly exultation, “ name as many a you please, without reserve or fear of molestation ! ” J—— was perplexed between so many amiable recollections, that the name of the lady of his choice expired in a

pensive whiff of his pipe ; and Lamb impatiently declared for the Duchess of Newcastle. Mrs. Hutchinson was no sooner mentioned than she carried the day from the Duchess. We were the less solicitous on this subject of filling up the posthumous lists of Good Women, as there was already one in the room as good, as sensible, and in all respects as exemplary, as the best of them could be for their lives ! “ I should like vastly to have seen Ninon de l’Enclos,” said that incomparable person, and this immediately put us in mind that we had neglected to pay honour due to our friends on the other side of the Channel : Voltaire, the patriarch of levity, and Rousseau, the father of sentiment ; Montaigne and Rabelais (great in wisdom and in wit) ; Molière and that illustrious group that are collected round him (in the print of that subject) to hear him read his comedy of the *Tartuffe* at the house of Ninon ; Racine, La Fontaine, Rochefoucault, St. Evremont, etc.

“ There is one person,” said a shrill, querulous voice, “ I would rather see than all these—Don Quixote ! ”

“ Come, come ! ” said Hunt ; “ I thought we should have no heroes, real or fabulous. What say you, Mr. Lamb ? Are you for eking out your shadowy list with such names as Alexander, Julius Cæsar, Tamerlane, or Ghengis Khan ? ”—“ Excuse me,” said Lamb ; “ on the subject of characters in active life, plotters and disturbers of the world, I have a crotchet of my own, which I beg leave to reserve.”—“ No, no ! come, out with your worthies ! ”—“ What do you think of Guy Fawkes and Judas Iscariot ? ” Hunt turned an eye upon him like a wild Indian, but cordial and full of

smothered glee. "Your most exquisite reason!" was echoed on all sides; and Ayrton thought that Lamb had now fairly entangled himself. "Why I cannot but think," retorted he of the wistful countenance, "that Guy Fawkes, that poor, fluttering annual scarecrow of straw and rags, is an ill-used gentleman. I would give something to see him sitting pale and emaciated, surrounded by his matches and his barrels of gunpowder, and expecting the moment that was to transport him to Paradise for his heroic self-devotion; but if I say any more, there is that fellow Godwin will make something of it. And as to Judas Iscariot, my reason is different. I would fain see the face of him who, having dipped his hand in the same dish with the Son of Man, could afterwards betray him. I have no conception of such a thing; nor have I ever seen any picture (not even Leonardo's very fine one) that gave me the least idea of it."—"You have said enough, Mr. Lamb, to justify your choice."

"Oh! ever right, Menenius—ever right!"

"There is only one other person I can ever think of after this," continued Lamb; but without mentioning a name that once put on a semblance of mortality. "If Shakspeare was to come into the room, we should all rise up to meet him; but if that person was to come into it, we should all fall down and try to kiss the hem of his garment!"

As a lady present seemed now to get uneasy at the turn the conversation had taken, we rose up to go. The morning broke with that dim, dubious light by which Giotto, Cimabue, and Ghirlandaio must have seen to paint their earliest works; and we parted to

meet again and renew similar topics at night, the next night, and the night after that, till that night overspread Europe, which saw no dawn. The same event, in truth, broke up our little Congress that broke up the great one. But that was to meet again : our deliberations have never been resumed.

III.

ON THE FEELING OF IMMORTALITY IN YOUTH.

No young man believes he shall ever die. It was a saying of my brother's, and a fine one. There is a feeling of Eternity in youth which makes us amends for everything. To be young is to be as one of the Immortals. One half of time indeed is spent—the other half remains in store for us with all its countless treasures, for there is no line drawn, and we see no limit to our hopes and wishes. We make the coming age our own—

“The vast, the unbounded prospect lies before us.”

Death, old age, are words without a meaning, a dream, a fiction, with which we have nothing to do. Others may have undergone, or may still undergo them—we “bear a charmed life,” which laughs to scorn all such idle fancies. As, in setting out on a delightful journey, we strain our eager sight forward,

“Bidding the lovely scenes at distance hail,”

and see no end to prospect after prospect, new objects presenting themselves as we advance, so in the outset of life we see no end to our desires nor to the opportunities of gratifying them. We have as yet found no obstacle, no disposition to flag, and it seems that we

can go on so for ever. We look round in a new world, full of life and motion, and ceaseless progress, and feel in ourselves all the vigour and spirit to keep pace with it, and do not foresee from any present signs how we shall be left behind in the race, decline into old age, and drop into the grave. It is the simplicity and, as it were, abstractedness of our feelings in youth that (so to speak) identifies us with nature and (our experience being weak and our passions strong) makes us fancy ourselves immortal like it. Our short-lived connection with being, we fondly flatter ourselves, is an indissoluble and lasting union. As infants smile and sleep, we are rocked in the cradle of our desires, and hushed into fancied security by the roar of the universe around us—we quaff the cup of life with eager thirst without draining it, and joy and hope seem ever mantling to the brim—objects press around us, filling the mind with their magnitude, and with the throng of desires that wait upon them, so that there is no room for the thoughts of death. We are too much dazzled by the gorgeousness and novelty of the bright waking dream about us to discern the dim shadow lingering for us in the distance. Nor would the hold that life has taken of us permit us to detach our thoughts that way, even if we could. We are too much absorbed in present objects and pursuits. While the spirit of youth remains unimpaired, ere “the wine of life is drunk,” we are like people intoxicated or in a fever, who are hurried away by the violence of their own sensations: it is only as present objects begin to pall upon the sense, as we have been disappointed in our favourite pursuits, cut off from our closest ties, that we by degrees

become weaned from the world, that passion loosens its hold upon futurity, and that we begin to contemplate as in a glass darkly the possibility of parting with it for good. Till then, the example of others has no effect upon us. Casualties we avoid; the slow approaches of age we play at *hide and seek* with. Like the foolish fat scullion in Sterne, who hears that Master Bobby is dead, our only reflection is, "So am not I!" The idea of death, instead of staggering our confidence, only seems to strengthen and enhance our sense of the possession and enjoyment of life. Others may fall around us like leaves, or be mowed down by the scythe of Time like grass: these are but metaphors to the unreflecting, buoyant ears and overweening presumption of youth. It is not till we see the flowers of Love, Hope, and Joy withering around us, that we give up the flattering delusions that before led us on, and that the emptiness and dreariness of the prospect before us reconciles us hypothetically to the silence of the grave.

Life is indeed a strange gift, and its privileges are most mysterious. No wonder when it is first granted to us, that our gratitude, our admiration, and our delight should prevent us from reflecting on our own nothingness, or from thinking it will ever be recalled. Our first and strongest impressions are borrowed from the mighty scene that is opened to us, and we unconsciously transfer its durability as well as its splendour to ourselves. So newly found, we cannot think of parting with it yet, or at least put off that consideration *sine die*. Like a rustic at a fair, we are full of amazement and rapture, and have no thought of going

home, or that it will soon be night. We know our existence only by ourselves, and confound our knowledge with the objects of it. We and Nature are therefore one. Otherwise the illusion, the "feast of reason and the flow of soul," to which we are invited, is a mockery and a cruel insult. We do not go from a play till the last act is ended, and the lights are about to be extinguished. But the fairy face of Nature still shines on : shall we be called away before the curtain falls, or ere we have scarce had a glimpse of what is going on ? Like children, our step-mother Nature holds us up to see the raree-show of the universe, and then, as if we were a burden to her to support, lets us fall down again. Yet what brave sublunary things does not this pageant present, like a ball or *fête* of the universe !

To see the golden sun, the azure sky, the outstretched ocean ; to walk upon the green earth, and be lord of a thousand creatures ; to look down yawning precipices or over distant sunny vales ; to see the world spread out under one's feet on a map ; to bring the stars near ; to view the smallest insects through a microscope ; to read history, and consider the revolutions of empire and the successions of generations ; to hear of the glory of Tyre, of Sidon, of Babylon, and of Susa, and to say all these were before me and are now nothing ; to say I exist in such a point of time, and in such a point of space ; to be a spectator and a part of its ever-moving scene ; to witness the change of season, of spring and autumn, of winter and summer ; to feel hot and cold, pleasure and pain, beauty and deformity, right and wrong ; to be sensible to the acci-

dents of nature ; to consider the mighty world of eye and ear ; to listen to the stock-dove's notes amid the forest deep ; to journey over moor and mountain ; to hear the midnight sainted choir ; to visit lighted halls, or the cathedral's gloom, or sit in crowded theatres and see life itself mocked ; to study the works of art and refine the sense of beauty to agony ; to worship fame, and to dream of immortality ; to look upon the Vatican, and to read Shakspeare ; to gather up the wisdom of the ancients, and to pry into the future ; to listen to the trump of war, the shout of victory ; to question history as to the movements of the human heart ; to seek for truth ; to plead the cause of humanity ; to overlook the world as if time and nature poured their treasures at our feet—to be and to do all this, and then in a moment to be nothing—to have it all snatched from us as by a juggler's trick, or a phantasmagoria ! There is something in this transition from all to nothing that shocks us and damps the enthusiasm of youth new flushed with hope and pleasure, and we cast the comfortless thought as far from us as we can. In the first enjoyment of the state of life we discard the fear of debts and duns, and never think of the final payment of our great debt to Nature. Art we know is long ; life, we flatter ourselves, should be so too. We see no end of the difficulties and delays we have to encounter : perfection is slow of attainment, and we must have time to accomplish it in. The fame of the great names we look up to is immortal : and shall not we who contemplate it imbibe a portion of the ethereal fire, the *divinæ particula auræ*, which nothing can extinguish ? A wrinkle in Rembrandt or

in Nature takes whole days to resolve itself into its component parts, its softenings and its sharpnesses ; we refine upon our perfections, and unfold the intricacies of Nature. What a prospect for the future ! What a task have we not begun ! And shall we be arrested in the middle of it ? We do not count our time thus employed lost, or our pains thrown away ; we do not flag or grow tired, but gain new vigour at our endless task. Shall Time, then, grudge us to finish what we have begun, and have formed a compact with Nature to do ? Why not fill up the blank that is left us in this manner ? I have looked for hours at a Rembrandt without being conscious of the flight of Time, but, with ever new wonder and delight, have thought that not only my own but another existence I could pass in the same manner. This rarefied, refined existence seemed to have no end, nor stint, nor principle of decay in it. The print would remain long after I who looked on it had become the prey of worms. The thing seems in itself out of all reason : health, strength, appetite are opposed to the idea of death, and we are not ready to credit it till we have found our illusions vanished, and our hopes grown cold. Objects in youth, from novelty, etc., are stamped upon the brain with such force and integrity that one thinks nothing can remove or obliterate them. They are riveted there, and appear to us as an element of our nature. It must be a mere violence that destroys them, not a natural decay. In the very strength of this persuasion we seem to enjoy an age by anticipation. We melt down years into a single moment of intense sympathy, and by anticipating the fruits defy the ravages of time. If, then, a

single moment of our lives is worth years, shall we set any limits to its total value and extent ? Again, does it not happen that so secure do we think ourselves of an indefinite period of existence, that at times, when left to ourselves, and impatient of novelty, we feel annoyed at what seems to us the slow and creeping progress of time, and argue that if it always moves at this tedious snail's pace it will never come to an end ? How ready are we to sacrifice any space of time which separates us from a favourite object, little thinking that before long we shall find it move too fast.

For my part, I started in life with the French Revolution, and I have lived, alas ! to see the end of it. But I did not foresee this result. My sun arose with the first dawn of liberty, and I did not think how soon both must set. The new impulse to ardour given to men's minds imparted a congenial warmth and glow to mine ; we were strong to run a race together, and I little dreamed that long before mine was set, the sun of liberty would turn to blood, or set once more in the night of despotism. Since then, I confess, I have no longer felt myself young, for with that my hopes fell.

I have since turned my thoughts to gathering up some of the fragments of my early recollections, and putting them into a form to which I might occasionally revert. The future was barred to my progress, and I turned for consolation and encouragement to the past. It is thus that, while we find our personal and substantial identity vanishing from us, we strive to gain a reflected and vicarious one in our thoughts : we do not like to perish wholly, and wish to bequeath

our names, at least, to posterity. As long as we can make our cherished thoughts and nearest interests live in the minds of others, we do not appear to have retired altogether from the stage. We still occupy the breasts of others, and exert an influence and power over them, and it is only our bodies that are reduced to dust and powder. Our favourite speculations still find encouragement, and we make as great a figure in the eye of the world, or perhaps a greater, than in our lifetime. The demands of our self-love are thus satisfied, and these are the most imperious and unremitting. Besides, if by our intellectual superiority we survive ourselves in this world, by our virtues and faith we may attain an interest in another, and a higher state of being, and may thus be recipients at the same time of men and of angels.

“E'en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires.”

As we grow old, our sense of the value of time becomes vivid. Nothing else, indeed, seems of any consequence. We can never cease wondering that that which has ever been should cease to be. We find many things remain the same: why then should there be change in us? This adds a convulsive grasp of whatever is, a sense of a fallacious hollowness in all we see. Instead of the full, pulpy feeling of youth tasting existence and every object in it, all is flat and vapid—a whited sepulchre, fair without, but full of ravening and all uncleanness within. The world is a witch that puts us off with false shows and appearances. The simplicity of youth, the confiding expectation, the bound-

less raptures, are gone : we only think of getting out of it as well as we can, and without any great mischance or annoyance. The flush of illusion, even the complacent retrospect of past joys and hopes, is over : if we can slip out of life without indignity, can escape with little bodily infirmity, and frame our minds to the calm and respectable composure of *still-life* before we return to physical nothingness, it is as much as we can expect. We do not die wholly at our deaths : we have mouldered away gradually long before. Faculty after faculty, interest after interest, attachment after attachment disappear : we are torn from ourselves while living, year after year sees us no longer the same, and death only consigns the last fragment of what we were to the grave. That we should wear out by slow stages, and dwindle at last into nothing, is not wonderful, when even in our prime our strongest impressions leave little trace but for the moment, and we are the creatures of petty circumstance. How little effect is made on us in our best days by the books we have read, the scenes we have witnessed, the sensations we have gone through ! Think only of the feelings we experience in reading a fine romance (one of Sir Walter's, for instance) ; what beauty, what sublimity, what interest, what heart-rending emotions ! You would suppose the feelings you then experienced would last for ever, or subdue the mind to their own harmony and tone : while we are reading it seems as if nothing could ever put us out of our way, or trouble us :—the first splash of mud that we get on entering the street, the first twopence we are cheated out of, the feeling vanishes clean out of our minds, and we

become the prey of petty and annoying circumstances. The mind soars to the lofty: it is at home in the grovelling, the disagreeable, and the little. And yet we wonder that age should be feeble and querulous—that the freshness of youth should fade away. Both worlds would hardly satisfy the extravagance of our desires and of our presumption.

IV.

THE INDIAN JUGGLERS.

COMING forward and seating himself on the ground in his white dress and tightened turban, the chief of the Indian Jugglers begins with tossing up two brass balls, which is what any of us could do, and concludes with keeping up four at the same time, which is what none of us could do to save our lives, nor if we were to take our whole lives to do it in. Is it then a trifling power we see at work, or is it not something next to miraculous ? It is the utmost stretch of human ingenuity, which nothing but the bending the faculties of body and mind to it from the tenderest infancy with incessant, ever-anxious application up to manhood can accomplish or make even a slight approach to. Man, thou art a wonderful animal, and thy ways past finding out ! Thou canst do strange things, but thou turnest them to little account !—To conceive of this effort of extraordinary dexterity distracts the imagination and makes admiration breathless. Yet it costs nothing to the performer, any more than if it were a mere mechanical deception with which he had nothing to do but to watch and laugh at the astonishment of the spectators. A single error of a hair's-breadth, of the smallest conceivable portion of time, would be fatal : the precision

of the movements must be like a mathematical truth, their rapidity is like lightning. To catch four balls in succession in less than a second of time, and deliver them back so as to return with seeming consciousness to the hand again ; to make them revolve round him at certain intervals, like the planets in their spheres ; to make them chase one another like sparkles of fire, or shoot up like flowers or meteors ; to throw them behind his back and twine them round his neck like ribbons or like serpents ; to do what appears an impossibility, and to do it with all the ease, the grace, the carelessness imaginable ; to laugh at, to play with the glittering mockeries ; to follow them with his eye as if he could fascinate them with its lambent fire, or as if he had only to see that they kept time with the music on the stage—there is something in all this which he who does not admire may be quite sure he never really admired anything in the whole course of his life. It is skill surmounting difficulty, and beauty triumphing over skill. It seems as if the difficulty once mastered naturally resolved itself into ease and grace, and as if to be overcome at all, it must be overcome without an effort. The smallest awkwardness or want of pliancy or self-possession would stop the whole process. It is the work of witchcraft, and yet sport for children. Some of the other feats are quite as curious and wonderful, such as the balancing the artificial tree and shooting a bird from each branch through a quill ; though none of them have the elegance or facility of the keeping up of the brass balls. You are in pain for the result, and glad when the experiment is over ; they are not accompanied with the same unmixed, un-

checked delight as the former ; and I would not give much to be merely astonished without being pleased at the same time. As to the swallowing of the sword, the police ought to interfere to prevent it. When I saw the Indian Juggler do the same things before, his feet were bare, and he had large rings on the toes, which kept turning round all the time of the performance, as if they moved of themselves.—The hearing a speech in Parliament drawled or stammered out by the Honourable Member or the Noble Lord ; the ringing the changes on their commonplaces, which any one could repeat after them as well as they, stirs me not a jot, shakes not my good opinion of myself ; but the seeing the Indian Jugglers does. It makes me ashamed of myself. I ask what there is that I can do as well as this ? Nothing. What have I been doing all my life ? Have I been idle, or have I nothing to show for all my labour and pains ? Or have I passed my time in pouring words like water into empty sieves, rolling a stone up a hill and then down again, trying to prove an argument in the teeth of facts, and looking for causes in the dark and not finding them ? Is there no one thing in which I can challenge competition, that I can bring as an instance of exact perfection in which others cannot find a flaw ? The utmost I can pretend to is to write a description of what this fellow can do. I can write a book : so can many others who have not even learned to spell. What abortions are these Essays ! What errors, what ill-pieced transitions, what crooked reasons, what lame conclusions ! How little is made out, and that little how ill ! Yet they are the best I can do. I endeavour to recollect

all I have ever observed or thought upon a subject, and to express it as nearly as I can. Instead of writing on four subjects at a time, it is as much as I can manage to keep the thread of one discourse clear and unentangled. I have also time on my hands to correct my opinions, and polish my periods ; but the one I cannot, and the other I will not do. I am fond of arguing : yet with a good deal of pains and practice it is often as much as I can do to beat my man ; though he may be an indifferent hand. A common fencer would disarm his adversary in the twinkling of an eye, unless he were a professor like himself. A stroke of wit will sometimes produce this effect, but there is no such power of superiority in sense or reasoning. There is no complete mastery of execution to be shown there ; and you hardly know the professor from the impudent pretender or the mere clown.*

I have always had this feeling of the inefficacy and slow progress of intellectual compared to mechanical excellence, and it has always made me somewhat dis-

* The celebrated Peter Pindar (Dr. Wolcot) first discovered and brought out the talents of the late Mr. Opie the painter. He was a poor Cornish boy, and was out at work in the fields when the poet went in search of him. "Well, my lad, can you go and bring me your very best picture?" The other flew like lightning, and soon came back with what he considered as his masterpiece. The stranger looked at it, and the young artist, after waiting for some time without his giving any opinion, at length exclaimed eagerly, "Well, what do you think of it?" "Think of it?" said Wolcot; "why, I think you ought to be ashamed of it—that you, who might do so well, do no better!" The same answer would have applied to this artist's latest performances, that had been suggested by one of his earliest efforts.

satisfied. It is a great many years since I saw Richer, the famous rope-dancer, perform at Sadler's Wells. He was matchless in his art, and added to his extraordinary skill exquisite ease, and unaffected, natural grace. I was at that time employed in copying a half-length picture of Sir Joshua Reynolds's; and it put me out of conceit with it. How ill this part was made out in the drawing! How heavy, how slovenly this other was painted! I could not help saying to myself, "If the rope-dancer had performed his task in this manner, leaving so many gaps and botches in his work, he would have broken his neck long ago; I should never have seen that vigorous elasticity of nerve and precision of movement!"—Is it, then, so easy an undertaking (comparatively) to dance on a tight-rope? Let any one who thinks so get up and try. There is the thing. It is that which at first we cannot do at all which in the end is done to such perfection. To account for this in some degree, I might observe that mechanical dexterity is confined to doing some one particular thing, which you can repeat as often as you please, in which you know whether you succeed or fail, and where the point of perfection consists in succeeding in a given undertaking.—In mechanical efforts you improve by perpetual practice, and you do so infallibly, because the object to be attained is not a matter of taste or fancy or opinion, but of actual experiment, in which you must either do the thing or not do it. If a man is put to aim at a mark with a bow and arrow, he must hit it or miss it, that's certain. He cannot deceive himself, and go on shooting wide or falling short and still fancy that he is making progress.

The distinction between right and wrong, between true and false, is here palpable ; and he must either correct his aim or persevere in his error with his eyes open, for which there is neither excuse nor temptation. If a man is learning to dance on a rope, if he does not mind what he is about he will break his neck. After that it will be in vain for him to argue that he did not make a false step. His situation is not like that of Goldsmith's pedagogue :—

“ In argument they own'd his wondrous skill,
And e'en though vanquish'd, he could argue still.”

Danger is a good teacher, and makes apt scholars. So are disgrace, defeat, exposure to immediate scorn and laughter. There is no opportunity in such cases for self-delusion, no idling time away, no being off your guard (or you must take the consequences)—neither is there any room for humour or caprice or prejudice. If the Indian Juggler were to play tricks in throwing up the three case-knives, which keep their positions like the leaves of a crocus in the air, he would cut his fingers. I can make a very bad antithesis without cutting my fingers. The tact of style is more ambiguous than that of double-edged instruments. If the Juggler were told that by flinging himself under the wheels of the Juggernaut, when the idol issues forth on a gaudy day, he would immediately be transported into Paradise, he might believe it, and nobody could disprove it. So the Brahmins may say what they please on that subject, may build up dogmas and mysteries without end, and not be detected ; but their ingenious countryman cannot persuade the frequenters

of the Olympic Theatre that he performs a number of astonishing feats without actually giving proofs of what he says.—There is, then, in this sort of manual dexterity, first a gradual aptitude acquired to a given exertion of muscular power, from constant repetition, and in the next place, an exact knowledge how much is still wanting and necessary to be supplied. The obvious test is to increase the effort or nicety of the operation, and still to find it come true. The muscles ply instinctively to the dictates of habit. Certain movements and impressions of the hand and eye, having been repeated together an infinite number of times, are unconsciously but unavoidably cemented into closer and closer union; the limbs require little more than to be put in motion for them to follow a regular track with ease and certainty; so that the mere intention of the will acts mathematically like touching the spring of a machine, and you come with Locksley in “Ivanhoe,” in shooting at a mark, “to allow for the wind.”

Further, what is meant by perfection in mechanical exercises is the performing certain feats to a uniform nicety, that is, in fact, undertaking no more than you can perform. You task yourself, the limit you fix is optional, and no more than human industry and skill can attain to; but you have no abstract, independent standard of difficulty or excellence (other than the extent of your own powers). Thus he who can keep up four brass balls does this *to perfection*; but he cannot keep up five at the same instant, and would fail every time he attempted it. That is, the mechanical performer undertakes to emulate himself, not to

equal another.* But the artist undertakes to imitate another, or to do what Nature has done, and this it appears is more difficult, viz. to copy what she has set before us in the face of nature or "human face divine," entire and without a blemish, than to keep up four brass balls at the same instant, for the one is done by the power of human skill and industry, and the other never was nor will be. Upon the whole, therefore, I have more respect for Reynolds than I have for Richer; for, happen how it will, there have been more people in the world who could dance on a rope like the one than who could paint like Sir Joshua. The latter was but a bungler in his profession to the other, it is true; but then he had a harder taskmaster to obey, whose will was more wayward and obscure, and whose instructions it was more difficult to practise. You can put a child apprentice to a tumbler or rope-dancer with a comfortable prospect of success, if they are but sound of wind and limb; but you cannot do the same thing in painting. The odds are a million to one. You may make indeed as many Haydons and H——s as you put into that sort of machine, but not one Reynolds amongst them all, with his grace, his grandeur, his blandness of gusto, "in tones and gestures hit," unless you could make the man over again. To snatch this grace beyond the reach of art is then the height of art—where fine art begins, and where mechanical skill ends. The soft suffusion of the soul, the speechless breathing eloquence, the looks "commercing with the skies," the ever-shifting forms of an eternal

* If two persons play against each other at any game, one of them necessarily fails.

principle, that which is seen but for a moment, but dwells in the heart always, and is only seized as it passes by strong and secret sympathy, must be taught by nature and genius, not by rules or study. It is suggested by feeling, not by laborious microscopic inspection ; in seeking for it without, we lose the harmonious clue to it within ; and in aiming to grasp the substance, we let the very spirit of art evaporate. In a word, the objects of fine art are not the objects of sight, but as these last are the objects of taste and imagination, that is, as they appeal to the sense of beauty, of pleasure, and of power in the human breast, and are explained by that finer sense, and revealed in their inner structure to the eye in return. Nature is also a language. Objects, like words, have a meaning ; and the true artist is the interpreter of this language, which he can only do by knowing its application to a thousand other objects in a thousand other situations. Thus the eye is too blind a guide of itself to distinguish between the warm or cold tone of a deep-blue sky ; but another sense acts as a monitor to it and does not err. The colour of the leaves in autumn would be nothing without the feeling that accompanies it ; but it is that feeling that stamps them on the canvas, faded, seared, blighted, shrinking from the winter's flaw, and makes the sight as true as touch—

“ And visions, as poetic eyes avow,
Cling to each leaf and hang on every bough.”

The more ethereal, evanescent, more refined and sublime part of art is the seeing Nature through the medium of sentiment and passion, as each object is a

symbol of the affections and a link in the chain of our endless being. But the unravelling this mysterious web of thought and feeling is alone in the Muse's gift, namely, in the power of that trembling sensibility which is awake to every change and every modification of its ever-varying impressions, that

“Thrills in each nerve, and lives along the line.”

This power is indifferently called genius, imagination, feeling, taste ; but the manner in which it acts upon the mind can neither be defined by abstract rules, as is the case in science, nor verified by continual, unvarying experiments, as is the case in mechanical performances. The mechanical excellence of the Dutch painters in colouring and handling is that which comes the nearest in fine art to the perfection of certain manual exhibitions of skill. The truth of the effect and the facility with which it is produced are equally admirable. Up to a certain point everything is faultless. The hand and eye have done their part. There is only a want of taste and genius. It is after we enter upon that enchanted ground that the human mind begins to droop and flag as in a strange road, or in a thick mist, benighted and making little way with many attempts and many failures, and that the best of us can only escape with half a triumph. The undefined and the imaginary are the regions that we must pass like Satan, difficult and doubtful, “half flying, half on foot.” The object in sense is a positive thing, and execution comes with practice.

Cleverness is a certain *knack* or aptitude at doing certain things, which depend more on a particular

adroitness and off-hand readiness than on force or perseverance, such as making puns, making epigrams, making extempore verses, mimicking the company, mimicking a style, etc. Cleverness is either liveliness and smartness, or something answering to *sleight of hand*, like letting a glass fall sideways off a table, or else a trick, like knowing the secret spring of a watch. Accomplishments are certain external graces, which are to be learned from others, and which are easily displayed to the admiration of the beholder, viz. dancing, riding, fencing, music, and so on. These ornamental acquirements are only proper to those who are at ease in mind and fortune. I know an individual who, if he had been born to an estate of five thousand a year, would have been the most accomplished gentleman of the age. He would have been the delight and envy of the circle in which he moved—would have graced by his manners the liberality flowing from the openness of his heart, would have laughed with the women, have argued with the men, have said good things and written agreeable ones, have taken a hand at piquet or the lead at the harpsichord, and have set and sung his own verses—*nugæ canoræ*—with tenderness and spirit ; a Rochester without the vice, a modern Surrey ! As it is, all these capabilities of excellence stand in his way. He is too versatile for a professional man, not dull enough for a political drudge, too gay to be happy, too thoughtless to be rich. He wants the enthusiasm of the poet, the severity of the prose-writer, and the application of the man of business.—Talent is the capacity of doing anything that depends on application and industry, such as writing a criticism,

making a speech, studying the law. Talent differs from genius as voluntary differs from involuntary power. Ingenuity is genius in trifles ; greatness is genius in undertakings of much pith and moment. A clever or ingenious man is one who can do anything well, whether it is worth doing or not ; a great man is one who can do that which when done is of the highest importance. Themistocles said he could not play on the flute, but that he could make of a small city a great one. This gives one a pretty good idea of the distinction in question.

Greatness is great power, producing great effects. It is not enough that a man has great power in himself ; he must show it to all the world in a way that cannot be hid or gainsaid. He must fill up a certain idea in the public mind. I have no other notion of greatness than this twofold definition, great result springing from great inherent energy. The great in visible objects has relation to that which extends over space ; the great in mental ones has to do with space and time. No man is truly great who is great only in his lifetime. The test of greatness is the page of history. Nothing can be said to be great that has a distinct limit, or that borders on something evidently greater than itself. Besides, what is short-lived and pampered into mere notoriety is of a gross and vulgar quality in itself. A Lord Mayor is hardly a great man. A city orator or patriot of the day only show, by reaching the height of their wishes, the distance they are at from any true ambition. Popularity is neither fame nor greatness. A king (as such) is not a great man. He has great power, but it is not his own. He merely

wields the lever of the state, which a child, an idiot, or a madman can do. It is the office, not the man, we gaze at. Any one else in the same situation would be just as much an object of abject curiosity. We laugh at the country girl who having seen a king expressed her disappointment by saying, "Why, he is only a man!" Yet, knowing this, we run to see a king as if he was something more than a man.—To display the greatest powers, unless they are applied to great purposes, makes nothing for the character of greatness. To throw a barleycorn through the eye of a needle, to multiply nine figures by nine in the memory, argues definite dexterity of body and capacity of mind, but nothing comes of either. There is a surprising power at work, but the effects are not proportionate, or such as take hold of the imagination. To impress the idea of power on others, they must be made in some way to feel it. It must be communicated to their understandings in the shape of an increase of knowledge, or it must subdue and overawe them by subjecting their wills. Admiration to be solid and lasting must be founded on proofs from which we have no means of escaping; it is neither a slight nor a voluntary gift. A mathematician who solves a profound problem, a poet who creates an image of beauty in the mind that was not there before, imparts knowledge and power to others, in which his greatness and his fame consists, and on which it reposes. Jedediah Buxton will be forgotten; but Napier's bones will live. Lawgivers, philosophers, founders of religion, conquerors and heroes, inventors and great geniuses in arts and sciences, are great men, for they are great public

benefactors, or formidable scourges to mankind. Among ourselves, Shakspeare, Newton, Bacon, Milton, Cromwell, were great men, for they showed great power by acts and thoughts, which have not yet been consigned to oblivion. They must needs be men of lofty stature, whose shadows lengthen out to remote posterity. A great farce-writer may be a great man ; for Molière was but a great farce-writer. In my mind, the author of " Don Quixote " was a great man. So have there been many others. A great chess-player is not a great man, for he leaves the world as he found it. No act terminating in itself constitutes greatness. This will apply to all displays of power or trials of skill which are confined to the momentary, individual effort, and construct no permanent image or trophy of themselves without them. Is not an actor then a great man, because " he dies and leaves the world no copy " ? I must make an exception for Mrs. Siddons, or else give up my definition of greatness for her sake. A man at the top of his profession is not therefore a great man. He is great in his way, but that is all, unless he shows the marks of a great moving intellect, so that we trace the master-mind, and can sympathise with the springs that urge him on. The rest is but a craft or *mystery*. John Hunter was a great man—*that* any one might see without the smallest skill in surgery. His style and manner showed the man. He would set about cutting up the carcass of a whale with the same greatness of gusto that Michael Angelo would have hewn a block of marble. Lord Nelson was a great naval commander ; but, for myself, I have not much opinion of a seafaring life. Sir Humphry Davy is a great chemist, but I am

not sure that he is a great man. I am not a bit the wiser for any of his discoveries, nor I never met with any one that was. But it is in the nature of greatness to propagate an idea in itself, as wave impels wave, circle without circle. It is a contradiction in terms for a coxcomb to be a great man. A really great man has always an idea of something greater than himself. I have observed that certain sectaries and polemical writers have no higher compliment to pay their most shining lights than to say that "Such a one was a considerable man in his day." Some new elucidation of a text sets aside the authority of the old interpretation, and a "great scholar's memory outlives him half a century," at the utmost. A rich man is not a great man, except to his dependants and his steward. A lord is a great man in the idea we have of his ancestry, and probably of himself, if we know nothing of him but his title. I have heard a story of two bishops, one of whom said (speaking of St. Peter's at Rome) that when he first entered it, he was rather awe struck, but then as he walked up it, his mind seemed to swell and dilate with it, and at last to fill the whole building : the other said that as he saw more of it, he appeared to himself to grow less and less every step he took, and in the end to dwindle into nothing. This was in some respects a striking picture of a great and little mind ; for greatness sympathises with greatness, and littleness shrinks into itself. The one might have become a Wolsey ; the other was only fit to become a Mendicant Friar—or there might have been court reasons for making him a bishop. The French have to me a character of littleness in all about them ; but they have

produced three great men that belong to every country, Molière, Rabelais, and Montaigne.

To return from this digression, and conclude the Essay. A singular instance of manual dexterity was shown in the person of the late John Cavanagh, whom I have several times seen. His death was celebrated at the time in an article in the *Examiner* newspaper (Feb. 7, 1819), written apparently between jest and earnest; but as it is *pat* to our purpose, and falls in with my own way of considering such subjects, I shall here take leave to quote it:—

“Died at his house in Burbage Street, St. Giles’s, John Cavanagh, the famous hand fives-player. When a person dies who does any one thing better than any one else in the world, which so many others are trying to do well, it leaves a gap in society. It is not likely that any one will now see the game of fives played in its perfection for many years to come—for Cavanagh is dead, and has not left his peer behind him. It may be said that there are things of more importance than striking a ball against a wall—there are things, indeed, that make more noise and do as little good, such as making war and peace, making speeches and answering them, making verses and blotting them, making money and throwing it away. But the game of fives is what no one despises who has ever played at it. It is the finest exercise for the body, and the best relaxation for the mind. The Roman poet said that ‘Care mounted behind the horseman and stuck to his skirts.’ But this remark would not have applied to the fives-player. He who takes to playing at fives is twice young. He feels neither the past nor future

‘in the instant.’ Debts, taxes, ‘domestic treason, foreign levy, nothing can touch him further.’ He has no other wish, no other thought, from the moment the game begins, but that of striking the ball, of placing it, of *making* it ! This Cavanagh was sure to do. Whenever he touched the ball there was an end of the chase. His eye was certain, his hand fatal, his presence of mind complete. He could do what he pleased, and he always knew exactly what to do. He saw the whole game, and played it ; took instant advantage of his adversary’s weakness, and recovered balls, as if by a miracle and from sudden thought, that every one gave for lost. He had equal power and skill, quickness and judgment. He could either outwit his antagonist by finesse, or beat him by main strength. Sometimes, when he seemed preparing to send the ball with the full swing of his arm, he would by a slight turn of his wrist drop it within an inch of the line. In general, the ball came from his hand, as if from a racket, in a straight, horizontal line, so that it was in vain to attempt to overtake or stop it. As it was said of a great orator that he never was at a loss for a word, and for the properest word, so Cavanagh always could tell the degree of force necessary to be given to a ball, and the precise direction in which it should be sent. He did his work with the greatest ease ; never took more pains than was necessary ; and while others were fagging themselves to death, was as cool and collected as if he had just entered the court. His style of play was as remarkable as his power of execution. He had no affectation, no trifling. He did not throw away the game to show off an attitude

or try an experiment. He was a fine, sensible, manly player, who did what he could, but that was more than any one else could even affect to do. His blows were not undecided and ineffectual—lumbering like Mr. Wordsworth's epic poetry, nor wavering like Mr. Coleridge's lyric prose, nor short of the mark like Mr. Brougham's speeches, nor wide of it like Mr. Canning's wit, nor foul like the *Quarterly*, nor *let* balls like the *Edinburgh Review*. Cobbett and Junius together would have made a Cavanagh. He was the best *up-hill* player in the world ; even when his adversary was fourteen, he would play on the same or better, and as he never flung away the game through carelessness and conceit, he never gave it up through laziness or want of heart. The only peculiarity of his play was that he never *volleyed*, but let the balls hop ; but if they rose an inch from the ground he never missed having them. There was not only nobody equal, but nobody second to him. It is supposed that he could give any other player half the game, or beat them with his left hand. His service was tremendous. He once played Woodward and Meredith together (two of the best players in England) in the Fives-court, St. Martin's Street, and made seven and twenty aces following by services alone—a thing unheard of. He another time played Peru, who was considered a first-rate fives-player, a match of the best out of five games, and in the three first games, which of course decided the match, Peru got only one ace. Cavanagh was an Irishman by birth, and a house-painter by profession. He had once laid aside his working-dress, and walked up, in his smartest clothes, to the Rosemary Branch,

to have an afternoon's pleasure. A person accosted him, and asked him if he would have a game. So they agreed to play for half a crown a game and a bottle of cider. The first game began—it was seven, eight, ten, thirteen, fourteen all. Cavanagh won it. The next was the same. They played on, and each game was hardly contested. 'There,' said the unconscious fives-player, 'there was a stroke that Cavanagh could not take: I never played better in my life, and yet I can't win a game. I don't know how it is!' However, they played on, Cavanagh winning every game, and the bystanders drinking the cider and laughing all the time. In the twelfth game, when Cavanagh was only four, and the stranger thirteen, a person came in and said, 'What! are you here, Cavanagh?' The words were no sooner pronounced than the astonished player let the ball drop from his hand, and saying, 'What! have I been breaking my heart all this time to beat Cavanagh?' refused to make another effort. 'And yet, I give you my word,' said Cavanagh, telling the story with some triumph, 'I played all the while with my clenched fist.'—He used frequently to play matches at Copenhagen House for wagers and dinners. The wall against which they play is the same that supports the kitchen-chimney, and when the wall resounded louder than usual, the cooks exclaimed, 'Those are the Irishman's balls,' and the joints trembled on the spit!—Goldsmith consoled himself that there were places where he too was admired: and Cavanagh was the admiration of all the fives-courts where he ever played. Mr. Powell, when he played matches in the court in St. Martin's

Street, used to fill his gallery at half a crown a head with amateurs and admirers of talent in whatever department it is shown. He could not have shown himself in any ground in England but he would have been immediately surrounded with inquisitive gazers, trying to find out in what part of his frame his unrivalled skill lay, as politicians wonder to see the balance of Europe suspended in Lord Castlereagh's face, and admire the trophies of the British Navy lurking under Mr. Croker's hanging brow. Now Cavanagh was as good-looking a man as the Noble Lord, and much better looking than the Right Hon. Secretary. He had a clear, open countenance, and did not look sideways or down, like Mr. Murray the bookseller. He was a young fellow of sense, humour, and courage. He once had a quarrel with a waterman at Hungerford Stairs, and, they say, served him out in great style. In a word, there are hundreds at this day who cannot mention his name without admiration as the best fives-player that perhaps ever lived (the greatest excellence of which they have any notion); and the noisy shout of the ring happily stood him in stead of the unheard voice of posterity! —The only person who seems to have excelled as much in another way as Cavanagh did in his was the late John Davies, the racket-player. It was remarked of him that he did not seem to follow the ball, but the ball seemed to follow him. Give him a foot of wall, and he was sure to make the ball. The four best racket-players of that day were Jack Spines, Jem Harding, Armitage, and Church. Davies could give any one of these two hands a time, that is, half the game, and

each of these, at their best, could give the best player now in London the same odds. Such are the gradations in all exertions of human skill and art. He once played four capital players together, and beat them. He was also a first-rate tennis-player and an excellent fives-player. In the Fleet or King's Bench he would have stood against Powell, who was reckoned the best open-ground player of his time. This last-mentioned player is at present the keeper of the Fives-Court, and we might recommend to him for a motto over his door, 'Who enters here, forgets himself, his country, and his friends.' And the best of it is, that by the calculation of the odds, none of the three are worth remembering!—Cavanagh died from the bursting of a blood-vessel, which prevented him from playing for the last two or three years. This, he was often heard to say, he thought hard upon him. He was fast recovering, however, when he was suddenly carried off, to the regret of all who knew him. As Mr. Peel made it a qualification of the present Speaker, Mr. Manners Sutton, that he was an excellent moral character, so Jack Cavanagh was a zealous Catholic, and could not be persuaded to eat meat on a Friday, the day on which he died. We have paid this willing tribute to his memory.

"Let no rude hand deface it,
And his forlorn '*Hic Jacet*.'"

V.

ON LIVING TO ONE'S-SELF.*

“ Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow,
Or by the lazy Scheldt or wandering Po.”

I NEVER was in a better place or humour than I am at present for writing on this subject. I have a partridge getting ready for my supper, my fire is blazing on the hearth, the air is mild for the season of the year, I have had but a slight fit of indigestion to-day (the only thing that makes me abhor myself), I have three hours good before me, and therefore I will attempt it. It is as well to do it at once as to have it to do for a week to come.

If the writing on this subject is no easy task, the thing itself is a harder one. It asks a troublesome effort to ensure the admiration of others : it is a still greater one to be satisfied with one's own thoughts. As I look from the window at the wide bare heath before me, and through the misty moonlight air see the woods that wave over the top of Winterslow,

“ While Heav'n's chancel-vault is blind with sleet,”

my mind takes its flight through too long a series of years, supported only by the patience of thought and secret yearnings after truth and good, for me to be at

* Written at Winterslow Hut, January 18-19, 1821.

a loss to understand the feeling I intend to write about ; but I do not know that this will enable me to convey it more agreeably to the reader.

Lady Grandison, in a letter to Miss Harriet Byron, assures her that " her brother Sir Charles lived to himself," and Lady L. soon after (for Richardson was never tired of a good thing) repeats the same observation ; to which Miss Byron frequently returns in her answers to both sisters, " For you know Sir Charles lives to himself," till at length it passes into a proverb among the fair correspondents. This is not, however, an example of what I understand by *living to one's self*, for Sir Charles Grandison was indeed always thinking of himself ; but by this phrase I mean never thinking at all about one's self, any more than if there was no such person in existence. The character I speak of is as little of an egoist as possible : Richardson's great favourite was as much of one as possible. Some satirical critic has represented him in Elysium " bowing over the *faded* hand of Lady Grandison " (Miss Byron that was)—he ought to have been represented bowing over his own hand, for he never admired any one but himself, and was the God of his own idolatry.—Neither do I call it living to one's self to retire into a desert (like the saints and martyrs of old) to be devoured by wild beasts, nor to descend into a cave to be considered as a hermit, nor to get to the top of a pillar or rock to do fanatic penance and be seen of all men. What I mean by living to one's self is living in the world, as in it, not of it : it is as if no one knew there was such a person, and you wished no one to know it : it is to be a silent spectator of the

mighty scene of things, not an object of attention or curiosity in it ; to take a thoughtful, anxious interest in what is passing in the world, but not to feel the slightest inclination to make or meddle with it. It is such a life as a pure spirit might be supposed to lead, and such an interest as it might take in the affairs of men, calm, contemplative, passive, distant, touched with pity for their sorrows, smiling at their follies without bitterness, sharing their affections, but not troubled by their passions, not seeking their notice, nor once dreamt of by them. He who lives wisely to himself and to his own heart looks at the busy world through the loopholes of retreat, and does not want to mingle in the fray. " He hears the tumult, and is still." He is not able to mend it, nor willing to mar it. He sees enough in the universe to interest him without putting himself forward to try what he can do to fix the eyes of the universe upon him. Vain the attempt ! He reads the clouds, he looks at the stars, he watches the return of the seasons, the falling leaves of autumn, the perfumed breath of spring, starts with delight at the note of a thrush in a copse near him, sits by the fire, listens to the moaning of the wind, pores upon a book, or discourses the freezing hours away, or melts down hours to minutes in pleasing thought. All this while he is taken up with other things, forgetting himself. He relishes an author's style without thinking of turning author. He is fond of looking at a print from an old picture in the room, without teasing himself to copy it. He does not fret himself to death with trying to be what he is not, or to do what he cannot. He hardly knows what he is capable of, and is not in the

least concerned whether he shall ever make a figure in the world. He feels the truth of the lines—

“The man whose eye is ever on himself,
Doth look one, the least of Nature's works;
One who might move the wise man to that scorn
Which wisdom holds unlawful ever.”

He looks out of himself at the wide, extended prospect of Nature, and takes an interest beyond his narrow pretensions in general humanity. He is free as air, and independent as the wind. Woe be to him when he first begins to think what others say of him. While a man is contented with himself and his own resources, all is well. When he undertakes to play a part on the stage, and to persuade the world to think more about him than they do about themselves, he is got into a track where he will find nothing but briars and thorns, vexation and disappointment. I can speak a little to this point. For many years of my life I did nothing but think. I had nothing else to do but solve some knotty point, or dip in some abstruse author, or look at the sky, or wander by the pebbled sea-side—

“To see the children sporting on the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.”

I cared for nothing. I wanted nothing. I took my time to consider whatever occurred to me, and was in no hurry to give a sophistical answer to a question—there was no printer's devil waiting for me. I used to write a page or two perhaps in half a year; and remember laughing heartily at the celebrated experimentalist Nicholson, who told me that in twenty years he had written as much as would make three hundred

octavo volumes. If I was not a great author, I could read with ever fresh delight, "never ending, still beginning," and had no occasion to write a criticism when I had done. If I could not paint like Claude, I could admire "the witchery of the soft blue sky" as I walked out, and was satisfied with the pleasure it gave me. If I was dull, it gave me little concern : if I was lively, I indulged my spirits. I wished well to the world, and believed as favourably of it as I could. I was like a stranger in a foreign land, at which I looked with wonder, curiosity, and delight, without expecting to be an object of attention in return. I had no relations to the state, no duty to perform, no ties to bind me to others : I had neither friend nor mistress, wife nor child. I lived in a world of contemplation, and not of action.

This sort of dreaming existence is the best. He who quits it to go in search of realities generally barter repose for repeated disappointments and vain regrets. His time, thoughts, and feelings are no longer at his own disposal. From that instant he does not survey the objects of Nature as they are in themselves, but looks askew at them to see whether he cannot make them the instruments of his ambition, interest, or pleasure ; for a candid, undesigning, undisguised simplicity of character, his views become jaundiced, sinister, and double : he takes no farther interest in the great changes of the world but as he has a paltry share in producing them : instead of opening his senses, his understanding, and his heart to the resplendent fabric of the universe, he holds a crooked mirror before his face, in which he may admire his own person and

pretensions, and just glance his eye aside to see whether others are not admiring him too. He no more exists in the impression which "the fair variety of things" makes upon him, softened and subdued by habitual contemplation, but in the feverish sense of his own upstart self-importance. By aiming to fix, he is become the slave of opinion. He is a tool, a part of a machine that never stands still, and is sick and giddy with the ceaseless motion. He has no satisfaction but in the reflection of his own image in the public gaze—but in the repetition of his own name in the public ear. He himself is mixed up with and spoils everything. I wonder Buonaparte was not tired of the N. N.'s stuck all over the Louvre and throughout France. Goldsmith (as we all know) when in Holland went out into a balcony with some handsome Englishwomen, and on their being applauded by the spectators, turned round and said peevishly, "There are places where I also am admired." He could not give the craving appetite of an author's vanity one day's respite. I have seen a celebrated talker of our own time turn pale and go out of the room when a showy-looking girl has come into it who for a moment divided the attention of his hearers.—Infinite are the mortifications of the bare attempt to emerge from obscurity; numberless the failures; and greater and more galling still the vicissitudes and tormenting accompaniments of success—

" Whose top to climb
Is certain falling, or so slippery, that
The fear's as bad as falling."

"Would to God," exclaimed Oliver Cromwell, when

he was at any time thwarted by the Parliament, "that I had remained by my woodside to tend a flock of sheep, rather than have been thrust on such a government as this!" When Buonaparte got into his carriage to proceed on his Russian expedition, carelessly twirling his glove, and singing the air, "Malbrook to the war is going," he did not think of the tumble he has got since, the shock of which no one could have stood but himself. We see and hear chiefly of the favourites of Fortune and the Muse, of great generals, of first-rate actors, of celebrated poets. These are at the head; we are struck with the glittering eminence on which they stand, and long to set out on the same tempting career, not thinking how many discontented half-pay lieutenants are in vain seeking promotion all their lives, and obliged to put up with "the insolence of office, and the spurns which patient merit of the unworthy takes"; how many half-starved strolling players are doomed to penury and tattered robes in country places, dreaming to the last of a London engagement; how many wretched daubers shiver and shake in the ague-fit of alternate hopes and fears, waste and pine away in the atrophy of genius, or else turn drawing-masters, picture-cleaners, or newspaper-critics; how many hapless poets have sighed out their souls to the Muse in vain, without ever getting their effusions farther known than the Poet's Corner of a country newspaper, and looked and looked with grudging, wistful eyes at the envious horizon that bounded their provincial fame!—Suppose an actor, for instance, "after the heart-aches and the thousand natural pangs that "flesh is heir to," *does* get at the top of his profession,

he can no longer bear a rival near the throne ; to be second or only equal to another is to be nothing : he starts at the prospect of a successor, and retains the mimic sceptre with a convulsive grasp : perhaps as he is about to seize the first place which he has long had in his eye, an unsuspected competitor steps in before him, and carries off the prize, leaving him to commence his irksome toil again. He is in a state of alarm at every appearance or rumour of the appearance of a new actor : “ a mouse that takes up its lodging in a cat’s ear ” * has a mansion of peace to him : he dreads every hint of an objection, and, least of all, can forgive praise mingled with censure : to doubt is to insult ; to discriminate is to degrade : he dare hardly look into a criticism unless some one has *tasted* it for him, to see that there is no offence in it : if he does not draw crowded houses every night, he can neither eat nor sleep ; or if all these terrible inflictions are removed and he can “ eat his meal in peace,” he then becomes surfeited with applause and dissatisfied with his profession : he wants to be something else, to be distinguished as an author, a collector, a classical scholar, a man of sense and information, and weighs every word he utters, and half retracts it before he utters it, lest if he were to make the smallest slip of the tongue it should get buzzed abroad that *Mr. — was only clever as an actor !* If ever there was a man who did not derive more pain than pleasure from his vanity, that man, says Rousseau, was no other than a fool. A country gentleman near Taunton spent his whole life in making some hundreds of wretched copies of

* Webster’s “ *Duchess of Malfy.*”

second-rate pictures, which were bought up at his death by a neighbouring baronet, to whom

“Some Demon whisper'd, L——, have a taste!”

A little Wilson in an obscure corner escaped the man of *virtù*, and was carried off by a Bristol picture-dealer for three guineas, while the muddled copies of the owner of the mansion (with the frames) fetched thirty, forty, sixty, a hundred ducats apiece. A friend of mine found a very fine Canaletti in a state of strange disfigurement, with the upper part of the sky smeared over and fantastically variegated with English clouds; and on inquiring of the person to whom it belonged whether something had not been done to it, received for answer “that a gentleman, a great artist in the neighbourhood, had retouched some parts of it.” What infatuation! Yet this candidate for the honours of the pencil might probably have made a jovial fox-hunter or respectable justice of the peace if he could only have stuck to what Nature and fortune intended him for. Miss —— can by no means be persuaded to quit the boards of the theatre at ——, a little country town in the West of England. Her salary has been abridged, her person ridiculed, her acting laughed at; nothing will serve—she is determined to be an actress, and scorns to return to her former business as a milliner. Shall I go on? An actor in the same company was visited by the apothecary of the place in an ague-fit, who, on asking his landlady as to his way of life, was told that the poor gentleman was very quiet and gave little trouble, that he generally had a plate of mashed potatoes for his dinner, and lay in

bed most of his time, repeating his part. A young couple, every way amiable and deserving, were to have been married, and a benefit-play was bespoke by the officers of the regiment quartered there, to defray the expense of a licence and of the wedding-ring, but the profits of the night did not amount to the necessary sum, and they have, I fear, “virgined it e’er since” ! Oh for the pencil of Hogarth or Wilkie to give a view of the comic strength of the company at —, drawn up in battle-array in the *Clandestine Marriage*, with a *coup d’œil* of the pit, boxes, and gallery, to cure for ever the love of the *ideal*, and the desire to shine and make holiday in the eyes of others, instead of retiring within ourselves and keeping our wishes and our thoughts at home !—Even in the common affairs of life, in love, friendship, and marriage, how little security have we when we trust our happiness in the hands of others ! Most of the friends I have seen have turned out the bitterest enemies, or cold, uncomfortable acquaintances. Old companions are like meats served up too often, that lose their relish and their wholesomeness. He who looks at beauty to admire, to adore it, who reads of its wondrous power in novels, in poems, or in plays, is not unwise ; but let no man fall in love, for from that moment he is “the baby of a girl.” I like very well to repeat such lines as these in the play of *Mirandola*—

“ With what a waving air she goes
Along the corridor ! How like a fawn !
Yet statelier. Hark ! No sound, however soft,
Nor gentlest echo telleth when she treads,
But every motion of her shape doth seem
Hallowed by silence.”

But however beautiful the description, defend me from meeting with the original !

“The fly that sips treacle
Is lost in the sweets;
So he that tastes woman
Ruin meets.”

The song is Gay's, not mine, and a bitter-sweet it is. How few out of the infinite number of those that marry and are given in marriage wed with those they would prefer to all the world ! nay, how far the greater proportion are joined together by mere motives of convenience, accident, recommendation of friends, or indeed not unfrequently by the very fear of the event, by repugnance and a sort of fatal fascination ! yet the tie is for life, not to be shaken off but with disgrace or death : a man no longer lives to himself, but is a body (as well as mind) chained to another, in spite of himself—

“Like life and death in disproportion met.”

So Milton (perhaps from his own experience) makes Adam exclaim in the vehemence of his despair,

“For either
He never shall find out fit mate, but such
As some misfortune brings him or mistake ;
Or whom he wishes most shall seldom gain
Through her perverseness, but shall see her gain'd
By a far worse ; or if she love, withheld
By parents ; or his happiest choice too late
Shall meet, already link'd and wedlock-bound
To a fell adversary, his hate and shame ;
Which infinite calamity shall cause
To human life, and household peace confound.”

If love at first sight were mutual, or to be conciliated by kind offices ; if the fondest affection were not so often repaid and chilled by indifference and scorn ; if

so many lovers both before and since the madman in "Don Quixote" had not "worshipped a statue, hunted the wind, cried aloud to the desert"; if friendship were lasting; if merit were renown, and renown were health, riches, and long life; or if the homage of the world were paid to conscious worth and the true aspirations after excellence, instead of its gaudy signs and outward trappings; then indeed I might be of opinion that it is better to live to others than one's self; but as the case stands, I incline to the negative side of the question.*

"I have not loved the world, nor the world me;
 I have not flattered its rank breath, nor bow'd
 To its idolatries a patient knee—
 Nor coin'd my cheek to smiles—nor cried aloud
 In worship of an echo; in the crowd
 They could not deem me one of such; I stood
 Among them, but not of them; in a shroud
 Of thoughts which were not their thoughts, and still could,
 Had I not filled my mind which thus itself subdued.

I have not loved the world, nor the world me—
 But let us part fair foes; I do believe,
 Though I have found them not, that there may be
 Words which are things—hopes which will not deceive,
 And virtues which are merciful nor weave
 Snares for the falling: I would also deem
 O'er others' griefs that some sincerely grieve;
 That two, or one, are almost what they seem—
 That goodness is no name, and happiness no dream."

* Shenstone and Gray were two men, one of whom pretended to live to himself, and the other really did so. Gray shrunk from the public gaze (he did not even like his portrait to be prefixed to his works) into his own thoughts and indolent musings; Shenstone affected privacy that he might be sought out by the world; the one courted retirement in order to enjoy leisure and repose, as the other coquetted with it merely to be interrupted with the importunity of visitors and the flatteries of absent friends.

Sweet verse embalms the spirit of sour misanthropy ; but woe betide the ignoble prose-writer who should thus dare to compare notes with the world, or tax it roundly with imposture.

If I had sufficient provocation to rail at the public, as Ben Jonson did at the audience in the Prologues to his plays, I think I should do it in good set terms, nearly as follows :—There is not a more mean, stupid, dastardly, pitiful, selfish, spiteful, envious, ungrateful animal than the Public. It is the greatest of cowards, for it is afraid of itself. From its unwieldy overgrown dimensions, it dreads the least opposition to it, and shakes like isinglass at the touch of a finger. It starts at its own shadow, like the man in the Hartz mountains, and trembles at the mention of its own name. It has a lion's mouth, the heart of a hare, with ears erect and sleepless eyes. It stands "listening its fears." It is so in awe of its own opinion that it never dare to form any, but catches up the first idle rumour, lest it should be behindhand in its judgment, and echoes it till it is deafened with the sound of its own voice. The idea of what the public will think prevents the public from ever thinking at all, and acts as a spell on the exercise of private judgment, so that, in short, the public ear is at the mercy of the first impudent pretender who chooses to fill it with noisy assertions, or false surmises, or secret whispers. What is said by one is heard by all ; the supposition that a thing is known to all the world makes all the world believe it, and the hollow repetition of a vague report drowns the "still, small voice" of reason. We may believe or know that what is said is not true ; but we know,

or fancy, that others believe it—we dare not contradict or are too indolent to dispute with them, and therefore give up our internal, and, as we think, our solitary conviction to a sound without substance, without proof, and often without meaning. Nay more, we may believe, and know not only that a thing is false, but that others believe and know it to be so, that they are quite as much in the secret of the imposture as we are, that they see the puppets at work, the nature of the machinery, and yet if any one has the art or power to get the management of it, he shall keep possession of the public ear by virtue of a cant phrase or nickname, and by dint of effrontery and perseverance make all the world believe and repeat what all the world knows to be false. The ear is quicker than the judgment. We know that certain things are said; by that circumstance alone, we know that they produce a certain effect on the imagination of others, and we conform to their prejudices by mechanical sympathy, and for want of sufficient spirit to differ with them. So far then is public opinion from resting on a broad and solid basis, as the aggregate of thought and feeling in a community, that it is slight and shallow and variable to the last degree—the bubble of the moment; so that we may safely say the public is the dupe of public opinion, not its parent. The public is pusillanimous and cowardly, because it is weak. It knows itself to be a great dunce, and that it has no opinions but upon suggestion. Yet it is unwilling to appear in leading-strings, and would have it thought that its decisions are as wise as they are weighty. It is hasty in taking up its favourites, more hasty in laying them

aside, lest it should be supposed deficient in sagacity in either case. It is generally divided into two strong parties, each of which will allow neither common sense nor common honesty to the other side. It reads the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly Reviews*, and believes them both—or if there is a doubt, malice turns the scale. Taylor and Hessey told me that they had sold nearly two editions of the “Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays” in about three months, but that after the *Quarterly Review* of them came out they never sold another copy. The public, enlightened as they are, must have known the meaning of that attack as well as those who made it. It was not ignorance then, but cowardice, that led them to give up their own opinion. A crew of mischievous critics at Edinburgh having affixed the epithet of the *Cockney School* to one or two writers born in the metropolis, all the people in London became afraid of looking into their works, lest they, too, should be convicted of cockneyism. Oh, brave public! This epithet proved too much for one of the writers in question, and stuck like a barbed arrow in his heart. Poor Keats! What was sport to the town was death to him. Young, sensitive, delicate, he was like

“A bud bit by an envious worm,
Ere he could spread his sweet leaves to the air
Or dedicate his beauty to the sun;”

and unable to endure the miscreant cry and idiot laugh, withdrew to sigh his last breath in foreign climes. The public is as envious and ungrateful as it is ignorant, stupid, and pigeon-livered—

“A huge-sized monster of ingratitude.”

It reads, it admires, it extols, only because it is the fashion, not from any love of the subject or the man. It cries you up or runs you down out of mere caprice and levity. If you have pleased it, it is jealous of its own involuntary acknowledgment of merit, and seizes the first opportunity, the first shabby pretext, to pick a quarrel with you and be quits once more. Every petty caviller is erected into a judge, every tale-bearer is implicitly believed. Every little, low, paltry creature that gaped and wondered, only because others did so, is glad to find you (as he thinks) on a level with himself. An author is not then, after all, a being of another order. Public admiration is forced, and goes against the grain. Public obloquy is cordial and sincere : every individual feels his own importance in it. They give you up bound hand and foot into the power of your accusers. To attempt to defend yourself is a high crime and misdemeanour, a contempt of court, an extreme piece of impertinence. Or if you prove every charge unfounded, they never think of retracting their error or making you amends. It would be a compromise of their dignity ; they consider themselves as the party injured, and resent your innocence as an imputation on their judgment. The celebrated Bub Doddington, when out of favour at court, said " he would not *justify* before his sovereign : it was for Majesty to be displeased, and for him to believe himself in the wrong ! " The public are not quite so modest. People already begin to talk of the Scotch Novels as overrated. How then can common authors be supposed to keep their heads long above water ? As a general rule, all those who live by the public starve,

and are made a by-word and a standing jest into the bargain. Posterity is no better (not a bit more enlightened or more liberal), except that you are no longer in their power, and that the voice of common fame saves them the trouble of deciding on your claims. The public now are the posterity of Milton and *Shakespeare*. Our posterity will be the living public of a future generation. When a man is dead, they put money in his coffin, erect monuments to his memory, and celebrate the anniversary of his birthday in set speeches. Would they take any notice of him if he were living? No!—I was complaining of this to a Scotchman who had been attending a dinner and a subscription to raise a monument to Burns. He replied he would sooner subscribe twenty pounds to his monument than have given it him while living; so that if the poet were to come to life again, he would treat him just as he was treated in fact. This was an honest Scotchman. What *he* said, the rest would do.

Enough: my soul, turn from them, and let me try to regain the obscurity and quiet that I love, “far from the madding strife,” in some sequestered corner of my own, or in some far-distant land! In the latter case, I might carry with me as a consolation the passage in Bolingbroke’s “Reflections on Exile,” in which he describes in glowing colours the resources which a man may always find within himself, and of which the world cannot deprive him:—

“Believe me, the providence of God has established such an order in the world, that of all which belongs to us the least valuable parts can alone fall under the will of others. Whatever is best is safest; lies

out of the reach of human power ; can neither be given nor taken away. Such is the great and beautiful work of nature, the world. Such is the mind of man, which contemplates and admires the world, whereof it makes the noblest part. These are inseparably ours, and as long as we remain in one we shall enjoy the other. Let us march therefore intrepidly wherever we are led by the course of human accidents. Wherever they lead us, on what coast soever we are thrown by them, we shall not find ourselves absolutely strangers. We shall feel the same revolution of seasons, and the same sun and moon * will guide the course of our year. The same azure vault, bespangled with stars, will be everywhere spread over our heads. There is no part of the world from whence we may not admire those planets which roll, like ours, in different orbits round the same central sun ; from whence we may not discover an object still more stupendous, that army of fixed stars hung up in the immense space of the universe, innumerable suns whose beams enlighten and cherish the unknown worlds which roll around them : and whilst I am ravished by such contemplations as these, whilst my soul is thus raised up to heaven, it imports me little what ground I tread upon."

* Plut. of Banishment. He compares those who cannot live out of their own country to the simple people who fancied the moon of Athens was a finer moon than that of Corinth,

"Labentem coelo quae ducitis annum."

VIRG. *Georg.*

VI.

ON GOING A JOURNEY.

ONE of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey; but I like to go by myself. I can enjoy society in a room; but out of doors, Nature is company enough for me. I am then never less alone than when alone.

“The fields his study, Nature was his book.”

I cannot see the wit of walking and talking at the same time. When I am in the country I wish to vegetate like the country. I am not for criticising hedgerows and black cattle. I go out of town in order to forget the town and all that is in it. There are those who for this purpose go to watering-places, and carry the metropolis with them. I like more elbow-room and fewer encumbrances. I like solitude, when I give myself up to it, for the sake of solitude; nor do I ask for

“a friend in my retreat,

Whom I may whisper solitude is sweet.”

The soul of a journey is liberty, perfect liberty, to think, feel, do, just as one pleases. We go a journey chiefly to be free of all impediments and of all inconveniences; to leave ourselves behind much more than to get rid of others. It is because I want a little

breathing-space to muse on indifferent matters, where
Contemplation

"May plume her feathers and let grow her wings,
That in the various bustle of resort
Were all too ruffled, and sometimes impair'd,

that I absent myself from the town for a while, without feeling at a loss the moment I am left by myself. Instead of a friend in a postchaise or in a Tilbury, to exchange good things with, and vary the same stale topics over again, for once let me have a truce with impertinence. Give me the clear blue sky over my head, and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three hours' march to dinner—and then to thinking! It is hard if I cannot start some game on these lone heaths. I laugh, I run, I leap, I sing for joy. From the point of yonder rolling cloud I plunge into my past being, and revel there, as the sun-burnt Indian plunges headlong into the wave that wafts him to his native shore. Then long-forgotten things, like "sunken wrack and sumless treasures," burst upon my eager sight, and I begin to feel, think, and be myself again. Instead of an awkward silence, broken by attempts at wit or dull commonplaces, mine is that undisturbed silence of the heart which alone is perfect eloquence. No one likes puns, alliterations, antitheses, argument, and analysis better than I do; but I sometimes had rather be without them. "Leave, oh, leave me to my repose!" I have just now other business in hand, which would seem idle to you, but is with me "very stuff o' the conscience." Is not this wild rose sweet without a comment? Does not this daisy leap to my heart set in its coat of emer-

ald ? Yet if I were to explain to you the circumstance that has so endeared it to me, you would only smile. Had I not better then keep it to myself, and let it serve me to brood over, from here to yonder craggy point, and from thence onward to the far-distant horizon ? I should be but bad company all that way, and therefore prefer being alone. I have heard it said that you may, when the moody fit comes on, walk or ride on by yourself, and indulge your reveries. But this looks like a breach of manners, a neglect of others, and you are thinking all the time that you ought to rejoin your party. "Out upon such half-faced fellowship," say I. I like to be either entirely to myself, or entirely at the disposal of others ; to talk or be silent, to walk or sit still, to be sociable or solitary. I was pleased with an observation of Mr. Cobbett's, that "he thought it a bad French custom to drink our wine with our meals, and that an Englishman ought to do only one thing at a time." So I cannot talk and think, or indulge in melancholy musing and lively conversation by fits and starts. "Let me have a companion of my way," says Sterne, "were it but to remark how the shadows lengthen as the sun declines." It is beautifully said ; but, in my opinion, this continual comparing of notes interferes with the involuntary impression of things upon the mind, and hurts the sentiment. If you only hint what you feel in a kind of dumb show, it is insipid : if you have to explain it, it is making a toil of a pleasure. You cannot read the book of Nature without being perpetually put to the trouble of translating it for the benefit of others. I am for this synthetical method on a journey in preference to the analytical. I am con-

tent to lay in a stock of ideas then, and to examine and anatomise them afterwards. I want to see my vague notions float like the down of the thistle before the breeze, and not to have them entangled in the briars and thorns of controversy. For once, I like to have it all my own way ; and this is impossible unless you are alone, or in such company as I do not covet. I have no objection to argue a point with any one for twenty miles of measured road, but not for pleasure. If you remark the scent of a bean-field crossing the road, perhaps your fellow-traveller has no smell. If you point to a distant object, perhaps he is short-sighted and has to take out his glass to look at it. There is a feeling in the air, a tone in the colour of a cloud, which hits your fancy, but the effect of which you are unable to account for. There is then no sympathy, but an uneasy craving after it, and a dissatisfaction which pursues you on the way, and in the end probably produces ill-humour. Now I never quarrel with myself, and take all my own conclusions for granted till I find it necessary to defend them against objections. It is not merely that you may not be of accord on the objects and circumstances that present themselves before you—these may recall a number of objects, and lead to associations too delicate and refined to be possibly communicated to others. Yet these I love to cherish, and sometimes still fondly clutch them, when I can escape from the throng to do so. To give way to our feelings before company seems extravagance or affectation ; and, on the other hand, to have to unravel this mystery of our being at every turn, and to make others take an equal interest in it (otherwise the end is not

answered), is a task to which few are competent. We must "give it an understanding, but no tongue." My old friend Coleridge, however, could do both. He could go on in the most delightful explanatory way over hill and dale a summer's day, and convert a landscape into a didactic poem or a Pindaric ode. "He talked far above singing." If I could so clothe my ideas in sounding and flowing words, I might perhaps wish to have some one with me to admire the swelling theme; or I could be more content, were it possible for me still to hear his echoing voice in the woods of All-Foxden.* They had "that fine madness in them which our first poets had"; and if they could have been caught by some rare instrument, would have breathed such strains as the following:—

"Here be woods as green
As any, air likewise as fresh and sweet
As when smooth Zephyrus plays on the fleet
Face of the curled streams, with flow'rs as many
As the young spring gives, and as choice as any;
Here be all new delights, cool streams and wells,
Arbours o'ergrown with woodbines, caves and dells,
Choose where thou wilt, whilst I sit by and sing,
Or gather rushes to make many a ring
For thy long fingers; tell thee tales of love,
How the pale Phoebe, hunting in a grove,
First saw the boy Endymion, from whose eyes
She took eternal fire that never dies;
How she convey'd him softly in a sleep,
His temples bound with poppy, to the steep
Head of old Latmos, where she stoops each night,
Gilding the mountain with her brother's light,
To kiss her sweetest.'†

* Near Nether-Stowey, Somersetshire, where the author of this Essay visited Coleridge in 1798. He was there again in 1803.

† Fletcher's "Faithful Shepherdess," l. 3 (Dyce's "Beaumont and Fletcher," ll. 38, 39).

Had I words and images at command like these, I would attempt to wake the thoughts that lie slumbering on golden ridges in the evening clouds : but at the sight of Nature my fancy, poor as it is, droops and closes up its leaves, like flowers at sunset. I can make nothing out on the spot : I must have time to collect myself.

In general, a good thing spoils out-of-door prospects : it should be reserved for Table-talk. Lamb is for this reason, I take it, the worst company in the world out of doors ; because he is the best within. I grant there is one subject on which it is pleasant to talk on a journey, and that is, what one shall have for supper when we get to our inn at night. The open air improves this sort of conversation or friendly altercation, by setting a keener edge on appetite. Every mile of the road heightens the flavour of the viands we expect at the end of it. How fine it is to enter some old town, walled and turreted, just at approach of nightfall, or to come to some straggling village, with the lights streaming through the surrounding gloom ; and then, after inquiring for the best entertainment that the place affords, to “ take one’s ease at one’s inn ” ! These eventful moments in our lives’ history are too precious, too full of solid, heartfelt happiness to be frittered and dribbled away in imperfect sympathy. I would have them all to myself, and drain them to the last drop : they will do to talk of or to write about afterwards. What a delicate speculation it is, after drinking whole goblets of tea—

“ The cups that cheer, but not inebriate—”

and letting the fumes ascend into the brain, to sit considering what we shall have for supper—eggs and a rasher, a rabbit smothered in onions, or an excellent veal-cutlet! Sancho in such a situation once fixed on cow-heel; and his choice, though he could not help it, is not to be disparaged. Then, in the intervals of pictured scenery and Shandean contemplation, to catch the preparation and the stir in the kitchen [getting ready for the gentleman in the parlour]. *Procul, O procul este profani!* These hours are sacred to silence and to musing, to be treasured up in the memory, and to feed the source of smiling thoughts hereafter. I would not waste them in idle talk; or if I must have the integrity of fancy broken in upon, I would rather it were by a stranger than a friend. A stranger takes his hue and character from the time and place; his is a part of the furniture and costume of an inn. If he is a Quaker, or from the West Riding of Yorkshire, so much the better. I do not even try to sympathise with him, and he breaks no squares. [How I love to see the camps of the gypsies, and to sigh my soul into that sort of life. If I express this feeling to another, he may qualify and spoil it with some objection.] I associate nothing with my travelling companion but present objects and passing events. In his ignorance of me and my affairs, I in a manner forgot myself. But a friend reminds one of other things, rips up old grievances, and destroys the abstraction of the scene. He comes in ungraciously between us and our imaginary character. Something is dropped in the course of conversation that gives a hint of your profession and pursuits; or from having some one with

you that knows the less sublime portions of your history, it seems that other people do. You are no longer a citizen of the world ; but your “unhoused free condition is put into circumspection and confine.” The incognito of an inn is one of its striking privileges—“lord of one’s self, uncumbered with a name.” Oh ! it is great to shake off the trammels of the world and of public opinion—to lose our importunate, tormenting, ever-lasting personal identity in the elements of nature, and become the creature of the moment, clear of all ties—to hold to the universe only by a dish of sweet-breads, and to owe nothing but the score of the evening—and no longer seeking for applause and meeting with contempt, to be known by no other title than *the Gentleman in the parlour* ! One may take one’s choice of all characters in this romantic state of uncertainty as to one’s real pretensions, and become indefinitely respectable and negatively right-worshipful. We baffle prejudice and disappoint conjecture ; and from being so to others, begin to be objects of curiosity and wonder even to ourselves. We are no more those hackneyed commonplaces that we appear in the world ; an inn restores us to the level of Nature, and quits scores with society ! I have certainly spent some enviable hours at inns—sometimes when I have been left entirely to myself, and have tried to solve some metaphysical problem, as once at Witham Common, where I found out the proof that likeness is not a case of the association of ideas—at other times when there have been pictures in the room, as at St. Neot’s (I think it was), where I first met with Gribelin’s engravings of the Cartoons, into which I entered at

once, and at a little inn on the borders of Wales, where there happened to be hanging some of Westall's drawings, which I compared triumphantly (for a theory that I had, not for the admired artist) with the figure of a girl who had ferried me over the Severn, standing up in a boat between me and the twilight—at other times I might mention luxuriating in books, with a peculiar interest in this way, as I remember sitting up half the night to read “Paul and Virginia,” which I picked up at an inn at Bridgewater after being drenched in the rain all day ; and at the same place I got through two volumes of Madame D'Arblay's “Camilla.” It was on the 10th of April, 1798, that I sat down to a volume of the *New Eloise*, at the inn at Llangollen, over a bottle of sherry and a cold chicken. The letter I chose was that in which St. Preux describes his feelings as he first caught a glimpse from the heights of the Jura of the Pays de Vaud, which I had brought with me as a *bon bouche* to crown the evening with. It was my birthday, and I had for the first time come from a place in the neighbourhood to visit this delightful spot. The road to Llangollen turns off between Chirk and Wrexham ; and on passing a certain point you come all at once upon the valley, which opens like an amphitheatre, broad, barren hills rising in majestic state on either side, with “green upland swells that echo to the bleat of flocks” below, and the river Dee babbling over its stony bed in the midst of them. The valley at this time “glittered green with sunny showers,” and a budding ash-tree dipped its tender branches in the chiding stream. How proud, how glad I was to walk along the high road that overlooks the delicious

prospect, repeating the lines which I have just quoted from Mr. Coleridge's poems ! But besides the prospect which opened beneath my feet, another also opened to my inward sight, a heavenly vision, on which were written, in letters large as Hope could make them, these four words, LIBERTY, GENIUS, LOVE, VIRTUE ; which have since faded into the light of common day, or mock my idle gaze.

"The beautiful is vanished, and returns not."

Still I would return some time or other to this enchanted spot ; but I would return to it alone. What other self could I find to share that influx of thoughts, of regret, and delight, the fragments of which I could hardly conjure up to myself, so much have they been broken and defaced. I could stand on some tall rock, and overlook the precipice of years that separates me from what I then was. I was at that time going shortly to visit the poet whom I have above named. Where is he now ? Not only I myself have changed ; the world, which was then new to me, has become old and incorrigible. Yet will I turn to thee in thought, O sylvan Dee, in joy, in youth and gladness as thou then wert ; and thou shalt always be to me the river of Paradise, where I will drink of the waters of life freely.

There is hardly anything that shows the short-sightedness or capriciousness of the imagination more than travelling does. With change of place we change our ideas ; nay, our opinions and feelings. We can by an effort indeed transport ourselves to old and long-forgotten scenes, and then the picture of the

mind revives again ; but we forget those that we have just left. It seems that we can think but of one place at a time. The canvas of the fancy is but of a certain extent, and if we paint one set of objects upon it, they immediately efface every other. We cannot enlarge our conceptions, we only shift our point of view. The landscape bares its bosom to the enraptured eye, we take our fill of it, and seem as if we could form no other image of beauty or grandeur. We pass on, and think no more of it : the horizon that shuts it from our sight also blots it from our memory like a dream. In travelling through a wild barren country I can form no idea of a woody and cultivated one. It appears to me that all the world must be barren, like what I see of it. In the country we forget the town, and in town we despise the country. " Beyond Hyde Park," says Sir Topling Flutter, " all is a desert." All that part of the map that we do not see before us is blank. The world in our conceit of it is not much bigger than a nutshell. It is not one prospect expanded into another, county joined to county, kingdom to kingdom, land to seas, making an image voluminous and vast ;—the mind can form no larger idea of space than the eye can take in at a single glance. The rest is a name written in a map, a calculation of arithmetic. For instance, what is the true signification of that immense mass of territory and population known by the name of China to us ? An inch of pasteboard on a wooden globe, of no more account than a China orange ! Things near us are seen of the size of life : things at a distance are diminished to the size of the understanding. We measure the universe by ourselves, and even com-

prehend the texture of our being only piecemeal. In this way, however, we remember an infinity of things and places. The mind is like a mechanical instrument that plays a great variety of tunes, but it must play them in succession. One idea recalls another, but it at the same time excludes all others. In trying to renew old recollections, we cannot as it were unfold the whole web of our existence ; we must pick out the single threads. So in coming to a place where we have formerly lived, and with which we have intimate associations, every one must have found that the feeling grows more vivid the nearer we approach the spot, from the mere anticipation of the actual impression : we remember circumstances, feelings, persons, faces, names that we had not thought of for years ; but for the time all the rest of the world is forgotten !—To return to the question I have quitted above :—

I have no objection to go to see ruins, aqueducts, pictures, in company with a friend or a party, but rather the contrary, for the former reason reversed. They are intelligible matters, and will bear talking about. The sentiment here is not tacit, but communicable and overt. Salisbury Plain is barren of criticism, but Stonehenge will bear a discussion antiquarian, picturesque, and philosophical. In setting out on a party of pleasure, the first consideration always is where we shall go to : in taking a solitary ramble, the question is what we shall meet with by the way. “ The mind is its own place ” ; nor are we anxious to arrive at the end of our journey. I can myself do the honours indifferently well to works of art and curiosity. I once took a party to Oxford with no mean *éclat*—

showed them that seat of the Muses at a distance,

“With glistening spires and pinnacles adorn’d—”

descanted on the learned air that breathes from the grassy quadrangles and stone walls of halls and colleges — was at home in the Bodleian ; and at Blenheim quite superseded the powdered Cicerone that attended us, and that pointed in vain with his wand to commonplace beauties in matchless pictures. As another exception to the above reasoning, I should not feel confident in venturing on a journey in a foreign country without a companion. I should want at intervals to hear the sound of my own language. There is an involuntary antipathy in the mind of an Englishman to foreign manners and notions that requires the assistance of social sympathy to carry it off. As the distance from home increases, this relief, which was at first a luxury, becomes a passion and an appetite. A person would almost feel stifled to find himself in the deserts of Arabia without friends and countrymen ; there must be allowed to be something in the view of Athens or old Rome that claims the utterance of speech ; and I own that the Pyramids are too mighty for any single contemplation. In such situations, so opposite to all one's ordinary train of ideas, one seems a species by one's-self, a limb torn off from society, unless one can meet with instant fellowship and support. Yet I did not feel this want or craving very pressing once, when I first set my foot on the laughing shores of France. Calais was peopled with novelty and delight. The confused, busy murmur of the place was like oil and wine poured into my ears ; nor did the mariners' hymn,

which was sung from the top of an old crazy vessel in the harbour, as the sun went down, send an alien sound into my soul. I only breathed the air of general humanity. I walked over "the vine-covered hills and gay regions of France," erect and satisfied; for the image of man was not cast down and chained to the foot of arbitrary thrones: I was at no loss for language, for that of all the great schools of painting was open to me. The whole is vanished like a shade. Pictures, heroes, glory, freedom, all are fled: nothing remains but the Bourbons and the French people! —There is undoubtedly a sensation in travelling into foreign parts that is to be had nowhere else; but it is more pleasing at the time than lasting. It is too remote from our habitual associations to be a common topic of discourse or reference, and, like a dream or another state of existence, does not piece into our daily modes of life. It is an animated, but a momentary, hallucination. It demands an effort to exchange our actual for our ideal identity; and to feel the pulse of our old transports revive very keenly, we must "jump" all our present comforts and connections. Our romantic and itinerant character is not to be domesticated. Dr. Johnson remarked how little foreign travel added to the facilities of conversation in those who had been abroad. In fact, the time we have spent there is both delightful and, in one sense, instructive; but it appears to be cut out of our substantial, downright existence, and never to join kindly on to it. We are not the same, but another, and perhaps more enviable individual, all the time we are out of our own country. We are lost to ourselves, as

well as our friends. So the poet somewhat quaintly sings :

“ Out of my country and myself I go.”

Those who wish to forget painful thoughts, do well to absent themselves for a while from the ties and objects that recall them ; but we can be said only to fulfil our destiny in the place that gave us birth. I should on this account like well enough to spend the whole of my life in travelling abroad, if I could anywhere borrow another life to spend afterwards at home !

VII.

WHY DISTANT OBJECTS PLEASE.

DISTANT objects please, because, in the first place, they imply an idea of space and magnitude, and because, not being obtruded too close upon the eye, we clothe them with the indistinct and airy colours of fancy. In looking at the misty mountain-tops that bound the horizon, the mind is as it were conscious of all the conceivable objects and interests that lie between; we imagine all sorts of adventures in the interim; strain our hopes and wishes to reach the air-drawn circle, or to "descry new lands, rivers, and mountains," stretching far beyond it: our feelings, carried out of themselves, lose their grossness and their husk, are rarefied, expanded, melt into softness and brighten into beauty, turning to ethereal mould, sky-tinctured. We drink the air before us, and borrow a more refined existence from objects that hover on the brink of nothing. Where the landscape fades from the dull sight, we fill the thin, viewless space with shapes of unknown good, and tinge the hazy prospect with hopes and wishes and more charming fears.

"But thou, oh Hope! with eyes so fair,
What was thy delighted measure?
Still it whisper'd promised pleasure,
And bade the lovely scenes at distance hail!"

Whatever is placed beyond the reach of sense and knowledge, whatever is imperfectly discerned, the fancy pieces out at its leisure ; and all but the present moment, but the present spot, passion claims for its own, and brooding over it with wings outspread, stamps it with an image of itself. Passion is lord of infinite space, and distant objects please because they border on its confines and are moulded by its touch. When I was a boy, I lived within sight of a range of lofty hills, whose blue tops blending with the setting sun had often tempted my longing eyes and wandering feet. At last I put my project in execution, and on a nearer approach, instead of glimmering air woven into fantastic shapes, found them huge lumpish heaps of discoloured earth. I learnt from this (in part) to leave " Yarrow unvisited," and not idly to disturb a dream of good !

Distance of time has much the same effect as distance of place. It is not surprising that fancy colours the prospect of the future as it thinks good, when it even effaces the forms of memory. Time takes out the sting of pain ; our sorrows after a certain period have been so often steeped in a medium of thought and passion that they " un mould their essence " ; and all that remains of our original impressions is what we would wish them to have been. Not only the untried steep ascent before us, but the rude, unsightly masses of our past experience presently resume their power of deception over the eye : the golden cloud soon rests upon their heads, and the purple light of fancy clothes their barren sides ! Thus we pass on, while both ends of our existence touch upon Heaven ! There is (so

to speak) "a mighty stream of tendency" to good in the human mind, upon which all objects float and are imperceptibly borne along; and though in the voyage of life we meet with strong rebuffs, with rocks and quicksands, yet there is "a tide in the affairs of men," a heaving and a restless aspiration of the soul, by means of which, "with sails and tackle torn," the wreck and scattered fragments of our entire being drift into the port and haven of our desires! In all that relates to the affections, we put the will for the deed; so that the instant the pressure of unwelcome circumstances is removed, the mind recoils from their hold, recovers its elasticity, and reunites itself to that image of good which is but a reflection and configuration of its own nature. Seen in the distance, in the long perspective of waning years, the meanest incidents, enlarged and enriched by countless recollections, become interesting; the most painful, broken and softened by time, soothe. How any object that unexpectedly brings back to us old scenes and associations startles the mind! What a yearning it creates within us; what a longing to leap the intermediate space! How fondly we cling to, and try to revive the impression of all that we then were!

"Such tricks hath strong imagination!"

In truth we impose upon ourselves, and know not what we wish. It is a cunning artifice, a quaint delusion, by which, in pretending to be what we were at a particular moment of time, we would fain be all that we have since been, and have our lives to come over again. It is not the little, glimmering, almost annihilated speck in the distance that rivets our attention and "hangs

upon the beatings of our hearts": it is the interval that separates us from it, and of which it is the trembling boundary, that excites all this coil and mighty pudder in the breast. Into that great gap in our being "come thronging soft desires" and infinite regrets. It is the contrast, the change from what we then were, that arms the half-extinguished recollection with its giant strength, and lifts the fabric of the affections from its shadowy base. In contemplating its utmost verge, we overlook the map of our existence, and re-tread, in apprehension, the journey of life. So it is that in early youth we strain our eager sight after the pursuits of manhood; and, as we are sliding off the stage, strive to gather up the toys and flowers that pleased our thoughtless childhood.

When I was quite a boy my father used to take me to the Montpelier Tea Gardens at Walworth. Do I go there now? No; the place is deserted, and its borders and its beds o'turned. Is there, then, nothing that can

"Bring back the hour
Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flower?"

Oh! yes. I unlock the casket of memory, and draw back the warders of the brain; and there this scene of my infant wanderings still lives unfaded, or with fresher dyes. A new sense comes upon me, as in a dream; a richer perfume, brighter colours start out; my eyes dazzle; my heart heaves with its new load of bliss, and I am a child again. My sensations are all glossy, spruce, voluptuous, and fine: they wear a candied coat, and are in holiday trim. I see the beds of larkspur with purple eyes; tall hollyhocks, red or

yellow ; the broad sunflowers, caked in gold, with bees buzzing round them ; wildernesses of pinks, and hot glowing peonies ; poppies run to seed ; the sugared lily, and faint mignonette, all ranged in order, and as thick as they can grow ; the box-tree borders ; the gravel-walks, the painted alcove, the confectionery, the clotted cream :—I think I see them now with sparkling looks ; or have they vanished while I have been writing this description of them ? No matter ; they will return again when I least think of them. All that I have observed since, of flowers and plants, and grass-plots, and of suburb delights, seems to me borrowed from “ that first garden of my innocence ” —to be slips and scions stolen from that bed of memory. In this manner the darlings of our childhood burnish out in the eye of after years, and derive their sweetest perfume from the first heartfelt sigh of pleasure breathed upon them,

“ Like the sweet south,
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour ! ”

If I have pleasure in a flower-garden, I have in a kitchen-garden too, and for the same reason. If I see a row of cabbage-plants, or of peas or beans coming up, I immediately think of those which I used so carefully to water of an evening at Wem, when my day's tasks were done, and of the pain with which I saw them droop and hang down their leaves in the morning's sun. Again, I never see a child's kite in the air but it seems to pull at my heart. It is to me “ a thing of life.” I feel the twinge at my elbow, the flutter and palpitation, with which I used to let go the string of

my own, as it rose in the air, and towered among the clouds. My little cargo of hopes and fears ascended with it ; and as it made a part of my own consciousness then, it does so still, and appears "like some gay creature of the element," my playmate when life was young, and twin-born with my earliest recollections. I could enlarge on this subject of childish amusements, but Mr. Leigh Hunt has treated it so well, in a paper in the *Indicator*, on the productions of the toy-shops of the metropolis, that if I were to insist more on it I should only pass for an imitator of that ingenious and agreeable writer, *and for an indifferent one into the bargain.*

Sounds, smells, and sometimes tastes, are remembered longer than visible objects, and serve, perhaps, better for links in the chain of association. The reason seems to be this : they are in their nature intermittent, and comparatively rare ; whereas objects of sight are always before us, and, by their continuous succession, drive one another out. The eye is always open ; and between any given impression and its recurrence a second time, fifty thousand other impressions have, in all likelihood, been stamped upon the sense and on the brain. The other senses are not so active or vigilant. They are but seldom called into play. The ear, for example, is oftener courted by silence than noise ; and the sounds that break that silence sink deeper and more durably into the mind. I have a more present and lively recollection of certain scents, tastes, and sounds, for this reason, than I have of mere visible images, because they are more original, and less worn by frequent repetition. Where there is

nothing interposed between any two impressions, whatever the distance of time that parts them, they naturally seem to touch ; and the renewed impression recalls the former one in full force, without distraction or competitor. The taste of barberries, which have hung out in the snow during the severity of a North American winter, I have in my mouth still, after an interval of thirty years ; for I have met with no other taste in all that time at all like it. It remains by itself, almost like the impression of a sixth sense. But the colour is mixed up indiscriminately with the colours of many other berries, nor should I be able to distinguish it among them. The smell of a brick-kiln carries the evidence of its own identity with it : neither is it to me (from peculiar associations) unpleasant. The colour of brickdust, on the contrary, is more common, and easily confounded with other colours. Raphael did not keep it quite distinct from his flesh-colour. I will not say that we have a more perfect recollection of the human voice than of that complex picture the human face, but I think the sudden hearing of a well-known voice has something in it more affecting and striking than the sudden meeting with the face : perhaps, indeed, this may be because we have a more familiar remembrance of the one than the other, and the voice takes us more by surprise on that account. I am by no means certain (generally speaking) that we have the ideas of the other senses so accurate and well made out as those of visible form : what I chiefly mean is, that the feelings belonging to the sensations of our other organs, when accidentally recalled, are kept more separate and pure. Musical sounds, probably,

owe a good deal of their interest and romantic effect to the principle here spoken of. Were they constant, they would become indifferent, as we may find with respect to disagreeable noises, which we do not hear after a time. I know no situation more pitiable than that of a blind fiddler who has but one sense left (if we except the sense of snuff-taking *) and who has that stunted or deafened by his own villainous noises. Shakspeare says.

“How silver-sweet sound lovers’ tongues by night!”

It has been observed in explanation of this passage, that it is because in the day-time lovers are occupied with one another’s faces, but that at night they can only distinguish the sound of each other’s voices. I know not how this may be ; but I have, ere now, heard a voice break so upon the silence,

“To angels’ ’twas most like,”

and charm the moonlight air with its balmy essence, that the budding leaves trembled to its accents. Would I might have heard it once more whisper peace and hope (as erst when it was mingled with the breath of spring), and with its soft pulsations lift winged fancy to heaven. But it has ceased, or turned where I no more shall hear it!—Hence, also, we see what is the charm of the shepherd’s pastoral reed; and why we hear him, as it were, piping to his flock, even in a picture. Our ears are fancy stung! I remember once strolling along the margin of a stream, skirted

* See Wilkie’s “Blind Fiddler.”

with willows and plashy sedges, in one of those low sheltered valleys on Salisbury Plain, where the monks of former ages had planted chapels and built hermits' cells. There was a little parish church near, but tall elms and quivering alders hid it from my sight, when, all of a sudden, I was startled by the sound of the full organ pealing on the ear, accompanied by rustic voices and the willing choir of village maids and children. It rose, indeed, "like an exhalation of rich distilled perfumes." The dew from a thousand pastures was gathered in its softness; the silence of a thousand years spoke in it. It came upon the heart like the calm beauty of death; fancy caught the sound, and faith mounted on it to the skies. It filled the valley like a mist, and still poured out its endless chant, and still it swells upon the ear, and wraps me in a golden trance, drowning the noisy tumult of the world!

There is a curious and interesting discussion on the comparative distinctness of our visual and other external impressions in Mr. Fearn's "Essay on Consciousness," with which I shall try to descend from this rhapsody to the ground of common sense and plain reasoning again. After observing, a little before, that "nothing is more untrue than that sensations of vision do necessarily leave more vivid and durable ideas than those of grosser senses," he proceeds to give a number of illustrations in support of this position. "Notwithstanding," he says, "the advantages here enumerated in favour of sight, I think there is no doubt that a man will come to forget acquaintance, and many other visible objects, noticed in mature age, before he will in the least forget taste and smells,

of only moderate interest, encountered either in his childhood or at any time since.

“In the course of voyaging to various distant regions, it has several times happened that I have eaten once or twice of different things that never came in my way before nor since. Some of these have been pleasant, and some scarce better than insipid ; but I have no reason to think I have forgot or much altered the ideas left by those single impulses of taste ; though here the memory of them certainly has not been preserved by repetition. It is clear I must have seen as well as tasted those things ; and I am decided that I remember the tastes with more precision than I do the visual sensations.

“I remember having once, and only once, eat Kangaroo in New Holland ; and having once smelled a baker's shop having a peculiar odour in the city of Bassorah. Now both these gross ideas remain with me quite as vivid as any visual ideas of those places ; and this could not be from repetition, but really from interest in the sensation.

“Twenty-eight years ago, in the island of Jamaica, I partook (perhaps twice) of a certain fruit, of the taste of which I have now a very fresh idea ; and I could add other instances of that period.

“I have had repeated proofs of having lost retention of visual objects, at various distances of time, though they had once been familiar. I have not, during thirty years, forgot the delicate, and in itself most trifling sensation that the palm of my hand used to convey, when I was a boy, trying the different effects of what boys call *light* and *heavy* tops ; but I cannot remember

within several shades the brown coat which I left off a week ago. If any man thinks he can do better, let him take an ideal survey of his wardrobe, and then actually refer to it for proof.

“After retention of such ideas, it certainly would be very difficult to persuade me that feeling, taste, and smell can scarce be said to leave ideas, unless indistinct and obscure ones. . . .

“Show a Londoner correct models of twenty London churches, and, at the same time, a model of each, which differs, in several considerable features, from the truth, and I venture to say he shall not tell you, in any instance, which is the correct one, except by mere chance.

“If he is an architect he may be much more correct than any ordinary person : and this obviously is, because he has felt an interest in viewing these structures, which an ordinary person does not feel : and here interest is the sole reason of his remembering more correctly than his neighbour.

“I once heard a person quaintly ask another, How many trees there are in St. Paul's churchyard ? The question itself indicates that many cannot answer it, and this is found to be the case with those who have passed the church a hundred times : whilst the cause is, that every individual in the busy stream which glides past St. Paul's is engrossed in various other interests.

“How often does it happen that we enter a well-known apartment, or meet a well-known friend, and receive some vague idea of visible difference, but cannot possibly find out *what* it is ; until at length we come to perceive (or perhaps must be told) that some

ornament or furniture is removed, altered, or added in the apartment ; or that our friend has cut his hair, taken a wig, or has made any of twenty considerable alterations in his appearance. At other times we have no perception of alteration whatever, though the like has taken place.

“ It is, however, certain that sight, apposited with interest, can retain tolerably exact copies of sensations, especially if not too complex, such as of the human countenance and figure : yet the voice will convince us when the countenance will not ; and he is reckoned an excellent painter, and no ordinary genius, who can make a tolerable likeness from memory. Nay, more, it is a conspicuous proof of the inaccuracy of visual ideas, that it is an effort of consummate art, attained by many years’ practice, to take a strict likeness of the human countenance, even when the object is present ; and among those cases where the wilful cheat of flattery has been avoided, we still find in how very few instances the best painters produce a likeness up to the life, though practice and interest join in the attempt.

“ I imagine an ordinary person would find it very difficult, supposing he had some knowledge of drawing, to afford from memory a tolerable sketch of such a familiar object as his curtain, his carpet, or his dressing-gown, if the pattern of either be at all various or irregular ; yet he will instantly tell, with precision, either if his snuff or his wine has not the same character it had yesterday, though both these are compounds.

“ Beyond all this I may observe, that a draper who is in the daily habit of such comparisons cannot carry in his mind the particular shade of a colour during a

second of time ; and has no certainty of tolerably matching two simple colours, except by placing the patterns in contact." *

I will conclude the subject of this Essay with observing that (as it appears to me) a nearer and more familiar acquaintance with persons has a different and more favourable effect than that with places or things. The latter improve (as an almost universal rule) by being removed to a distance : the former, generally at least, gain by being brought nearer and more home to us. Report or imagination seldom raises any individual so high in our estimation as to disappoint us greatly when we are introduced to him : prejudice and malice constantly exaggerate defects beyond the reality. Ignorance alone makes monsters or bugbears : our actual acquaintances are all very commonplace people. The thing is, that as a matter of hearsay or conjecture, we make abstractions of particular vices, and irritate ourselves against some particular quality or action of the person we dislike : whereas individuals are concrete existences, not arbitrary denominations or nicknames ; and have innumerable other qualities, good, bad, and indifferent, besides the damning feature with which we fill up the portrait or caricature in our previous fancies. He can scarcely hate anyone that we know. An acute observer complained, that if there was any one to whom he had a particular spite, and a wish to let him see it, the moment he came to sit down with him his enmity was disarmed by some unforeseen circumstance. If it was a Quarterly Reviewer, he was in other respects like any other man. Suppose, again,

* " Essay on Consciousness," p. 303.

your adversary turns out a very ugly man, or wants an eye, you are baulked in that way: he is not what you expected, the object of your abstract hatred and implacable disgust. He may be a very disagreeable person, but he is no longer the same. If you come into a room where a man is, you find, in general, that he has a nose upon his face. "There's sympathy!" This alone is a diversion to your unqualified contempt. He is stupid, and says nothing, but he seems to have something in him when he laughs. You had conceived of him as a rank Whig or Tory—yet he talks upon other subjects. You knew that he was a virulent party-writer; but you find that the man himself is a tame sort of animal enough. He does not bite. That's something. In short, you can make nothing of it. Even opposite vices balance one another. A man may be pert in company, but he is also dull; so that you cannot, though you try, hate him cordially, merely for the wish to be offensive. He is a knave. Granted. You learn, on a nearer acquaintance, what you did not know before—that he is a fool as well; so you forgive him. On the other hand, he may be a profligate public character, and may make no secret of it; but he gives you a hearty shake by the hand, speaks kindly to servants, and supports an aged father and mother. Politics apart, he is a very honest fellow. You are told that a person has carbuncles on his face; but you have ocular proofs that he is sallow, and pale as a ghost. This does not much mend the matter; but it blunts the edge of the ridicule, and turns your indignation against the inventor of the lie; but he is ——, the editor of a Scotch magazine; so you are just where

you were. I am not very fond of anonymous criticism ; I want to know who the author can be : but the moment I learn this, I am satisfied. Even —— would do well to come out of his disguise. It is the mask only that we dread and hate : the man may have something human about him ! The notions, in short, which we entertain of people at a distance, or from partial representations, or from guess-work, are simply uncompounded ideas, which answer to nothing in reality : those which we derive from experience are mixed modes, the only true, and, in general, the most favourable ones. Instead of naked deformity, or abstract perfection—

“ Those faultless monsters which the world ne’er saw—”

“ the web of our lives is of mingled yarn, good and ill together : our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipt them not ; and our vices would despair, if they were not encouraged by our virtues.” This was truly and finely said long ago, by one who knew the strong and weak points of human nature ; but it is what sects, and parties, and those philosophers whose pride and boast it is to classify by nicknames, have yet to know the meaning of !

VIII.

MERRY ENGLAND.

“ St. George for merry England ! ”

THIS old-fashioned epithet might be supposed to have been bestowed ironically, or on the old principle—*Ut lucus a non lucendo*. Yet there is something in the sound that hits the fancy, and a sort of truth beyond appearances. To be sure, it is from a dull, homely ground that the gleams of mirth and jollity break out ; but the streaks of light that tinge the evening sky are not the less striking on that account. The beams of the morning sun shining on the lonely glade, or through the idle branches of the tangled forest, the leisure, the freedom, “ the pleasure of going and coming without knowing where,” the troops of wild deer, the sports of the chase, and other rustic gambols, were sufficient to justify the well-known appellation of “ Merry Sherwood,” and in like manner, we may apply the phrase to *Merry England*. The smile is not the less sincere because it does not always play upon the cheek ; and the jest is not the less welcome, nor the laugh less hearty, because they happen to be a relief from care or leaden-eyed melancholy. The instances are the more precious as they are rare ; and we look forward to them with the greater goodwill, or back upon them with the greater gratitude, as we drain the last drop in

the cup with particular relish. If not always gay or in good spirits, we are glad when any occasion draws us out of our natural gloom, and disposed to make the most of it. We may say with *Silence* in the play, "I have been merry once ere now"—and this once was to serve him all his life; for he was a person of wonderful silence and gravity, though he "chirped over his cups," and announced with characteristic glee that "there were pippins and cheese to come." *Silence* was in this sense a merry man, that is, he would be merry if he could, and a very great economy of wit, like very slender fare, was a banquet to him, from the simplicity of his tastes and habits. "Continents," says Hobbes, "have most of what they contain"—and in this view it may be contended that the English are the merriest people in the world, since they only show it on high-days and holidays. They are then like a schoolboy let loose from school, or like a dog that has slipped his collar. They are not gay like the French, who are one eternal smile of self-complacency, tortured into affectation, or spun out into languid indifference, nor are they voluptuous and immersed in sensual indolence, like the Italians; but they have that sort of intermittent, fitful, irregular gaiety, which is neither worn out by habit, nor deadened by passion, but is sought with avidity as it takes the mind by surprise, is startled by a sense of oddity and incongruity, indulges its wayward humours or lively impulses, with perfect freedom and lightness of heart, and seizes occasion by the forelock, that it may return to serious business with more cheerfulness, and have something to beguile the hours of thought or sadness.

I do not see how there can be high spirits without low ones ; and everything has its price according to circumstances. Perhaps we have to pay a heavier tax on pleasure than some others : what skills it, so long as our good spirits and good hearts enable us to bear it ?

“ They ” (the English), says Froissart, “ amused themselves sadly after the fashion of their country ” — *ils se rejouissoient tristement selon la coutume de leur pays*. They have indeed a way of their own. Their mirth is a relaxation from gravity, a challenge to dull care to be gone ; and one is not always clear at first, whether the appeal is successful. The cloud may still hang on the brow ; the ice may not thaw at once. To help them out in their new character is an act of charity. Anything short of hanging or drowning is something to begin with. They do not enter into their amusements the less doggedly because they may plague others. They like a thing the better for hitting them a rap on the knuckles, for making their blood tingle. They do not dance or sing, but they make good cheer—“ eat, drink, and are merry.” No people are fonder of field-sports, Christmas gambols, or practical jests. Blind-man’s-buff, hunt-the-slipper, hot-cockles, and snap-dragon, are all approved English games, full of laughable surprises and “ hair-breadth ’scapes,” and serve to amuse the winter fireside after the roast-beef and plum-pudding, the spiced ale and roasted crab, thrown (hissing-hot) into the foaming tankard. Punch (not the liquor, but the puppet) is not, I fear, of English origin ; but there is no place, I take it, where he finds himself more at home or meets a more joyous welcome,

where he collects greater crowds at the corners of streets, where he opens the eyes or distends the cheeks wider, or where the bangs and blows, the uncouth gestures, ridiculous anger, and screaming voice of the chief performer excite more boundless merriment or louder bursts of laughter among all ranks and sorts of people. An English theatre is the very throne of pantomime ; nor do I believe that the gallery and boxes of Drury Lane or Covent Garden filled on the proper occasion with holiday folks (big or little) yield the palm for undisguised, tumultuous, inextinguishable laughter to any spot in Europe. I do not speak of the refinement of the mirth (this is no fastidious speculation) but of its cordiality, on the return of these long-looked-for and licensed periods ; and I may add here, by way of illustration, that the English common people are a sort of grown children, spoiled and sulky perhaps, but full of glee and merriment, when their attention is drawn off by some sudden and striking object. The May-pole is almost gone out of fashion among us : but May-day, besides its flowering hawthorns and its pearly dews, has still its boasted exhibition of painted chimney-sweepers and their Jack-o'-the-Green, whose tawdry finery, bedizened faces, unwonted gestures, and short-lived pleasures call forth good-humoured smiles and looks of sympathy in the spectators. There is no place where trap-ball, fives, prison-base, football, quoits, bowls are better understood or more successfully practised ; and the very names of a cricket bat and ball make English fingers tingle. What happy days must " Long Robinson " have passed in getting ready his wickets and mending his bats, who, when two

of the fingers of his right hand were struck off by the violence of a ball, had a screw fastened to it to hold the bat, and with the other hand still sent the ball thundering against the boards that bounded *Old Lord's cricket-ground* ! What delightful hours must have been his in looking forward to the matches that were to come, in recounting the feats he had performed in those that were past ! I have myself whiled away whole mornings in seeing him strike the ball (like a countryman mowing with a scythe) to the farthest extremity of the smooth, level, sun-burnt ground ; and with long, awkward strides count the notches that made victory sure ! Then again, cudgel-playing, quarter-staff, bull and badger-baiting, cock-fighting are almost the peculiar diversions of this island, and often objected to as barbarous and cruel ; horse-racing is the delight and ruin of numbers ; and the noble science of boxing is all our own. Foreigners can scarcely understand how we can squeeze pleasure out of this pastime ; the luxury of hard blows given or received ; the joy of the ring ; the perseverance of the combatants.* The English

* "The gentle and free passage of arms at Ashby" was, we are told, so called by the chroniclers of the time, on account of the feats of horsemanship and the quantity of knightly blood that was shed. This last circumstance was perhaps necessary to qualify it with the epithet of "gentle," in the opinion of some of these historians. I think the reason why the English are the bravest nation on earth is, that the thought of blood or a delight in cruelty is not the chief excitement with them. Where it is, there is necessarily a *reaction* ; for though it may add to our eagerness and savage ferocity in inflicting wounds, it does not enable us to endure them with greater patience. The English are led to the attack or sustain it equally well, because they fight as they box, not out of malice, but

also excel, or are not excelled in wiring a hare, in stalking a deer, in shooting, fishing, and hunting. England to this day boasts her Robin Hood and his merry men, that stout archer and outlaw and patron-saint of the sporting-calendar. What a cheerful sound is that of the hunters, issuing from the autumnal wood and sweeping over hill and dale !

“—A cry more tuneable
Was never halloo'd to by hound or horn.”

What sparkling richness in the scarlet coats of the riders, what a glittering confusion in the pack, what spirit in the horses, what eagerness in the followers on foot, as they disperse over the plain, or force their way over hedge and ditch ! Surely, the coloured prints and pictures of these, hung up in gentlemen's halls, and village alehouses, however humble as works of art,

to show *pluck* and manhood. *Fair play and old England for ever!* This is the only bravery that will stand the test. There is the same determination and spirit shown in resistance as in attack ; but not the same pleasure in getting a cut with a sabre as in giving one. There is, therefore, always a certain degree of effeminacy mixed up with any approach to cruelty, since both have their source in the same principle, viz., an over-valuing of pain.* This was the reason the French (having the best cause and the best general in the world) ran away at Waterloo, because they were inflamed, furious, drunk with the blood of their enemies, but when it came to their turn, wanting the same stimulus, they were panic-struck, and their hearts and their senses failed them all at once.

* Vanity is the same half-witted principle, compared with pride. It leaves men in the lurch when it is most needed ; is mortified at being reduced to stand on the defensive, and relinquishes the field to its more surly antagonist.

have more life and health and spirit in them, and mark the pith and nerve of the national character more creditably, than the mawkish, sentimental, affected designs of Theseus and Pirithous, and Æneas and Dido, pasted on foreign *salons à manger*, and the interior of country-houses. If our tastes are not epic, nor our pretensions lofty, they are simple and our own; and we may possibly enjoy our native rural sports and the rude remembrances of them with the truer relish on this account, that they are suited to us and we to them. The English nation, too, are naturally "brothers of the angle." This pursuit implies just that mixture of patience and pastime, of vacancy and thoughtfulness, of idleness and business, of pleasure and of pain, which is suited to the genius of an Englishman, and as I suspect, of no one else in the same degree. He is eminently gifted to stand in the situation assigned by Dr. Johnson to the angler, "at one end of a rod with a worm at the other." I should suppose no other language than ours can show such a book as an often-mentioned one, Walton's "Complete Angler"—so full of *naïveté*, of unaffected sprightliness, of busy trifling, of dainty songs, of refreshing brooks, of shady arbours, of happy thoughts and of the herb called *Heart's Ease*! Some persons can see neither the wit nor wisdom of this genuine volume, as if a book as well as a man might not have a personal character belonging to it, amiable, venerable from the spirit of joy and thorough goodness it manifests, independently of acute remarks or scientific discoveries; others object to the cruelty of Walton's theory and practice of trout-fishing—for my part, I should as soon charge an infant with

cruelty for killing a fly, and I feel the same sort of pleasure in reading his book as I should have done in the company of this happy, childlike old man, watching his ruddy cheek, his laughing eye, the kindness of his heart, and the dexterity of his hand in seizing his finny prey ! It must be confessed, there is often an odd sort of *materiality* in English sports and recreations. I have known several persons, whose existence consisted wholly in manual exercises, and all whose enjoyments lay at their finger-ends. Their greatest happiness was in cutting a stick, in mending a cabbage-net, in digging a hole in the ground, in hitting a mark, turning a lathe, or in something else of the same kind, at which they had a certain *knack*. Well is it when we can amuse ourselves with such trifles and without injury to others ! This class of character, which the *Spectator* has immortalised in the person of Will Wimble, is still common among younger brothers and retired gentlemen of small incomes in town or country. London is half suburbs. The suburbs of Paris are a desert, and you see nothing but crazy windmills, stone walls, and a few straggling visitants, in spots where in England you would find a thousand villas, a thousand terraces, crowned with their own delights, or be stunned with the noise of bowling-greens and tea-gardens, or stifled with the fumes of tobacco mingling with fragrant shrubs, or the clouds of dust raised by half the population of the metropolis panting and toiling in search of a mouthful of fresh air. The Parisian is, perhaps, as well (or better) contented with himself wherever he is, stewed in his shop or his garret ; the Londoner is miserable in these circumstances, and

glad to escape from them.* Let no one object to the gloomy appearance of a London Sunday, compared with a Parisian one. It is a part of our politics and our religion : we would not have James the First's " Book of Sports " thrust down our throats : and besides, it is a part of our character to do one thing at a time, and not to be dancing a jig and on our knees in the same breath. It is true the Englishman spends his Sunday evening at the ale-house—

" And e'en on Sunday
He drinks with Kirton Jean till Monday—"

but he only unbends and waxes mellow by degrees, and sits soaking till he can neither sit, stand, nor go : it is his vice, and a beastly one it is, but not a proof of any inherent distaste to mirth or good fellowship. Neither can foreigners throw the carnival in our teeth with any effect : those who have seen it (at Florence, for example), will say that it is duller than anything in England. Our Bartholomew Fair is Queen Mab herself to it ! What can be duller than a parcel of masks moving about the streets and looking as grave and monotonous as possible from day to day, and with the same lifeless formality in their limbs and gestures as in their features ? One might as well expect variety and spirit in a procession of wax-work figures. We must be hard run indeed, when we have recourse to a pasteboard proxy to set off our mirth : a mask may be a very good cover for licentiousness (though of that I

* The English are fond of change of scene; the French of change of posture; the Italians like to sit still, and do nothing.

saw no signs), but it is a very bad exponent of wit and humour. I should suppose there is more drollery and unction in the caricatures in Fore's shop-window, than in all the masks in Italy, without exception.*

The humour of English writing and description has often been wondered at; and it flows from the same source as the merry *traits* of our character. A degree of barbarism and rusticity seems necessary to the perfection of humour. The droll and laughable depend on peculiarity and incongruity of character. But with the progress of refinement, the peculiarities of individuals and of classes wear out or lose their sharp, abrupt edges; nay, a certain slowness and dulness of understanding is required to be struck with odd and unaccountable appearances, for which a greater facility of apprehension can sooner assign an explanation that breaks the force of the seeming absurdity, and to which a wider scope of imagination is more easily reconciled. Clowns and country people are more amused, are more disposed to laugh and make sport of the dress of strangers, because from their ignorance the surprise is greater, and they cannot conceive anything to be natural or proper to which they are unused. Without

* Bells are peculiar to England. They jangle them in Italy during the carnival as boys do with us at Shrovetide; but they have no notion of ringing them. The sound of village bells never cheers you in travelling, nor have you the lute or cittern in their stead. The expression of "Merry Bells" is a favourite, and not one of the least appropriate in our language:

"For him the merry bells had rung, I ween,
If in this nook of quiet bells had ever been."

Castle of Indolence.†

† Canto 1. st. 62.

a given portion of hardness and repulsiveness of feeling the ludicrous cannot well exist. Wonder and curiosity, the attributes of inexperience, enter greatly into its composition. Now it appears to me that the English are (or were) just at that mean point between intelligence and obtuseness which must produce the most abundant and happiest crop of humour. Absurdity and singularity glide over the French mind without jarring or jostling with it; or they evaporate in levity: with the Italians they are lost in indolence or pleasure. The ludicrous takes hold of the English imagination, and clings to it with all its ramifications. We resent any difference or peculiarity of appearance at first, and yet, having not much malice at our hearts, we are glad to turn it into a jest—we are liable to be offended, and as willing to be pleased—struck with oddity from not knowing what to make of it, we wonder and burst out a laughing at the eccentricity of others, while we follow our own bent from wilfulness or simplicity, and thus afford them, in our turn, matter for the indulgence of the comic vein. It is possible that a greater refinement of manners may give birth to finer distinctions of satire and a nicer tact for the ridiculous: but our insular situation and character are, I should say, most likely to foster, as they have in fact fostered, the greatest quantity of natural and striking humour, in spite of our plodding tenaciousness, and want both of gaiety and quickness of perception. A set of raw recruits with their awkward movements and unbending joints are laughable enough; but they cease to be so when they have once been drilled into discipline and uniformity. So it is with nations that

lose their angular points and grotesque qualities with education and intercourse : but it is in a mixed state of manners that comic humour chiefly flourishes, for, in order that the drollery may not be lost, we must have spectators of the passing scene who are able to appreciate and embody its most remarkable features—wits as well as *butts* for ridicule. I shall mention two names in this department which may serve to redeem the national character from absolute dulness and solemn pretence—Fielding and Hogarth. These were thorough specimens of true English humour ; yet both were grave men. In reality, too high a pitch of animal spirits runs away with the imagination, instead of helping it to reach the goal ; is inclined to take the jest for granted when it ought to work it out with patient and marked touches, and it ends in vapid flippancy and impertinence. Among our neighbours on the Continent, Molière and Rabelais carried the freedom of wit and humour to an almost incredible height ; but they rather belonged to the old French school, and even approach and exceed the English licence and extravagance of conception. I do not consider Congreve's wit (though he belongs to us) as coming under the article here spoken of ; for his genius is anything but *merry*. Lord Byron was in the habit of railing at the spirit of our good old comedy, and of abusing Shakespeare's Clowns and Fools, which he said the refinement of the French and Italian stage would not endure, and which only our grossness and puerile taste could tolerate. In this I agree with him ; and it is *pat* to my purpose. I flatter myself that we are almost the only people who understand and

relish *nonsense*. We are not "merry and wise," but indulge our mirth to excess and folly. When we trifle, we trifle in good earnest; and having once relaxed our hold of the helm, drift idly down the stream, and, delighted with the change, are tossed about "by every little breath" of whim or caprice

"That under Heaven is blown."

All we then want is to proclaim a truce with reason, and to be pleased with as little expense of thought or pretension to wisdom as possible. This licensed fooling is carried to its very utmost length in Shakspeare, and in some other of our elder dramatists, without, perhaps, sufficient warrant or the same excuse. Nothing can justify this extreme relaxation but extreme tension. Shakspeare's trifling does indeed tread upon the very borders of vacancy: his meaning often hangs by the very slenderest threads. For this he might be blamed if it did not take away our breath to follow his eagle flights, or if he did not at other times make the cordage of our hearts crack. After our heads ache with thinking, it is fair to play the fool. The clowns were as proper an appendage to the gravity of our antique literature, as fools and dwarfs were to the stately dignity of courts and noble houses in former days. Of all people, they have the best right to claim a total exemption from rules and rigid formality, who, when they have anything of importance to do, set about it with the greatest earnestness and perseverance, and are generally grave and sober to a proverb.* Swift, who

* The strict formality of French serious writing is resorted to as a foil to the natural levity of their character.

wrote more idle or *nonsense* verses than any man, was the severest of moralists, and his feelings and observations morbidly acute. Did not Lord Byron himself follow up his "Childe Harold" with his "Don Juan"? —not that I insist on what he did as an illustration of the English character. He was one of the English Nobility, not one of the English people; and his occasional ease and familiarity were in my mind equally constrained and affected, whether in relation to the pretensions of his rank or the efforts of his genius.

They ask you in France, how you pass your time in England without amusements; and can with difficulty believe that there are theatres in London, still less that they are larger and handsomer than those in Paris. That we should have comic actors, "they own surprises them." They judge of the English character in the lump as one great jolter-head, containing all the stupidity of the country, as the large ball at the top of the Dispensary in Warwick Lane, from its resemblance to a gilded pill, has been made to represent the whole pharmacopœia and professional quackery of the kingdom. They have no more notion, for instance, how we should have such an actor as Liston on our stage, than if we were to tell them we have parts performed by a sea-otter; nor, if they were to see him, would they be much the wiser, or know what to think of his unaccountable twitches of countenance or nondescript gestures, of his teeth chattering in his head, his eyes that seem dropping from their sockets, his nose that is tickled by a jest as by a feather, and shining with self-complacency as if oiled, his ignorant

conceit, his gaping stupor, his lumpish vivacity in Lubin Log or Tony Lumpkin; for as our rivals do not wind up the machine to such a determined intensity of purpose, neither have they any idea of its running down to such degrees of imbecility and folly, or coming to an absolute *stand-still* and lack of meaning, nor can they enter into or be amused with the contrast. No people ever laugh heartily who can give a reason for their doing so: and I believe the English in general are not yet in this predicament. They are not metaphysical, but very much in a state of nature; and this is one main ground why I give them credit for being merry, notwithstanding appearances. Their mirth is not the mirth of vice or desperation, but of innocence and a native wildness. They do not cavil or boggle at niceties, or merely come to the edge of a joke, but break their necks over it with a wanton "Here goes," where others make a *pirouette* and stand upon decorum. The French cannot, however, be persuaded of the excellence of our comic stage, nor of the store we set by it. When they ask what amusements we have, it is plain they can never have heard of Mrs. Jordan, nor King, nor Bannister, nor Suett, nor Munden, nor Lewis, nor little Simmons, nor Dodd, and Parsons, and Emery, and Miss Pope, and Miss Farren, and all those who even in my time have gladdened a nation and "made life's business like a summer's dream." Can I think of them, and of their names that glittered in the play-bills when I was young, exciting all the flutter of hope and expectation of seeing them in their favourite parts of Nell, or Little Pickle, or Touchstone, or Sir Peter Teazle, or Lenitive in the *Prize*, or Lingo,

or Crabtree, or Nipperkin, or old Dornton, or Ranger, or the Copper Captain, or Lord Sands, or Fitch, or Moses, or Sir Andrew Aguecheek, or Acres, or Elbow, or Hodge, or Flora, or the Duenna, or Lady Teazle, or Lady Grace, or of the gaiety that sparkled in all eyes, and the delight that overflowed all hearts, as they glanced before us in these parts,

“Throwing a gaudy shadow upon life—”

and not feel my heart yearn within me, or couple the thoughts of England and the spleen together? Our cloud has at least its rainbow tints; ours is not one long polar night of cold and dulness, but we have the gleaming lights of fancy to amuse us, the household fires of truth and genius to warm us. We can go to a play and see Liston; or stay at home and read “Roderick Random”; or have Hogarth’s prints of “Marriage à la Mode” hanging round our room. Tut! “there’s livens” even in England, as well as “out of it.” We are not quite the *forlorn hope* of humanity, the last of nations. The French look at us across the Channel, and seeing nothing but water and a cloudy mist, think that this is England. If they have any farther idea of us, it is of George III. and our Jack tars, the House of Lords and House of Commons; and this is no great addition to us. To go beyond this, to talk of arts and elegances as having taken up their abode here, or to say that Mrs. Abington was equal to Mademoiselle Mars, and that we at one time got up the *School for Scandal*, as they do the *Misanthrope*, is to persuade them that Iceland is a pleasant winter retreat, or to

recommend the whale-fishery as a classical amusement. The French are the *cockneys* of Europe, and have no idea how any one can exist out of Paris, or be alive without incessant grimace and *jabber*. Yet what imports it? What! though the joyous train I have just enumerated were, perhaps, never heard of in the precincts of the Palais-Royal, is it not enough that they gave pleasure where they were, to those who saw and heard them? Must our laugh, to be sincere, have its echo on the other side of the water? Had not the French their favourites and their enjoyments at the time, that we knew nothing of? Why then should we not have ours (and boast of them too) without their leave? A monopoly of self-conceit is not a monopoly of all other advantages. The English, when they go abroad, do not take away the prejudice against them by their looks. We seem duller and sadder than we are. As I write this, I am sitting in the open air in a beautiful valley, near Vevy: Clarens is on my left, the Dent de Jamant is behind me, the rocks of Meillerie opposite: under my feet is a green bank, enamelled with white and purple flowers, in which a dewdrop here and there still glitters with pearly light—

“And gaudy butterflies flutter around.”

Intent upon the scene and upon the thoughts that stir within me, I conjure up the cheerful passages of my life, and a crowd of happy images appear before me. No one would see it in my looks—my eyes grow dull and fixed, and I seem rooted to the spot, as all this phantasmagoria passes in review before me, glanc-

ing a reflex lustre on the face of the world and Nature. But the traces of pleasure, in my case, sink into an absorbent ground of thoughtful melancholy, and require to be brought out by time and circumstances, or (as the critics tell you) by the *varnish* of style !

The *comfort*, on which the English lay so much stress, is of the same character, and arises from the same source as their mirth. Both exist by contrast and a sort of contradiction. The English are certainly the most uncomfortable of all people in themselves, and therefore it is that they stand in need of every kind of comfort and accommodation. The least thing puts them out of their way, and therefore everything must be in its place. They are mightily offended at disagreeable tastes and smells, and therefore they exact the utmost neatness and nicety. They are sensible of heat and cold, and therefore they cannot exist, unless everything is snug and warm, or else open and airy, where they are. They must have "all appliances and means to boot." They are afraid of interruption and intrusion, and therefore they shut themselves up in indoor enjoyments, and by their own firesides. It is not that they require luxuries (for that implies a high degree of epicurean indulgence and gratification), but they cannot do without *their comforts* ; that is, whatever tends to supply their physical wants, and ward off physical pain and annoyance. As they have not a fund of animal spirits and enjoyments in themselves, they cling to external objects for support, and derive solid satisfaction from the ideas of order, cleanliness, plenty, property, and domestic quiet, as they seek

for diversion from odd accidents and grotesque surprises, and have the highest possible relish, not of voluptuous softness, but of hard knocks and dry blows, as one means of ascertaining their personal identity.

IX.

ON A SUN-DIAL.

“To carve out dials quaintly, point by point.”

SHAKSPEARE.

HORAS non numero nisi serenas—is the motto of a sundial near Venice. There is a softness and a harmony in the words and in the thought unparalleled. Of all conceits it is surely the most classical. “I count only the hours that are serene.” What a bland and care-dispelling feeling! How the shadows seem to fade on the dial-plate as the sky lours, and time presents only a blank unless as its progress is marked by what is joyous, and all that is not happy sinks into oblivion! What a fine lesson is conveyed to the mind—to take no note of time but by its benefits, to watch only for the smiles and neglect the frowns of fate, to compose our lives of bright and gentle moments, turning always to the sunny side of things, and letting the rest slip from our imaginations, unheeded or forgotten! How different from the common art of self-tormenting! For myself, as I rode along the Brenta, while the sun shone hot upon its sluggish, slimy waves, my sensations were far from comfortable; but the reading this inscription on the side of a glaring wall in an instant restored me to myself; and still, whenever I think of or repeat it, it has the power of wafting

me into the region of pure and blissful abstraction. I cannot help fancying it to be a legend of Popish superstition. Some monk of the dark ages must have invented and bequeathed it to us, who, loitering in trim gardens and watching the silent march of time, as his fruits ripened in the sun or his flowers scented the balmy air, felt a mild languor pervade his senses, and having little to do or to care for, determined (in imitation of his sun-dial) to efface that little from his thoughts or draw a veil over it, making of his life one long dream of quiet! *Horas non numero nisi serenas*—he might repeat, when the heavens were overcast and the gathering storm scattered the falling leaves, and turn to his books and wrap himself in his golden studies! Out of some such mood of mind, indolent, elegant, thoughtful, this exquisite device (speaking volumes) must have originated.

Of the several modes of counting time, that by the sun-dial is perhaps the most apposite and striking, if not the most convenient or comprehensive. It does not obtrude its observations, though it “morals on the time,” and, by its stationary character, forms a contrast to the most fleeting of all essences. It stands *sub dio*—under the marble air, and there is some connection between the image of infinity and eternity. I should also like to have a sun-flower growing near it with bees fluttering round.* It should be of iron to denote duration, and have a dull, leaden look. I hate a sun-dial made of wood, which is rather calculated to

* Is this a verbal fallacy? Or in the close, retired, sheltered scene which I have imagined to myself, is not the sunflower a natural accompaniment of the sundial?

show the variations of the seasons than the progress of time, slow, silent, imperceptible, chequered with light and shade. If our hours were all serene, we might probably take almost as little note of them as the dial does of those that are clouded. It is the shadow thrown across that gives us warning of their flight. Otherwise, our impressions would take the same undistinguishable hue ; we should scarce be conscious of our existence. Those who have had none of the cares of this life to harass and disturb them, have been obliged to have recourse to the hopes and fears of the next to vary the prospect before them. Most of the methods for measuring the lapse of time have, I believe, been the contrivance of monks and religious recluses, who, finding time hang heavy on their hands, were at some pains to see how they got rid of it. The hour-glass is, I suspect, an older invention ; and it is certainly the most defective of all. Its creeping sands are not indeed an unapt emblem of the minute, countless portions of our existence ; and the manner in which they gradually slide through the hollow glass and diminish in number till not a single one is left, also illustrates the way in which our years slip from us by stealth : but as a mechanical invention, it is rather a hindrance than a help, for it requires to have the time, of which it pretends to count the precious moments, taken up in attention to itself, and in seeing that when one end of the glass is empty we turn it round, in order that it may go on again, or else all our labour is lost, and we must wait for some other mode of ascertaining the time before we can recover our reckoning and proceed as before. The philosopher

in his cell, the cottager at her spinning-wheel must, however, find an invaluable acquisition in this "companion of the lonely hour," as it has been called,* which not only serves to tell how the time goes, but to fill up its vacancies. What a treasure must not the little box seem to hold, as if it were a sacred deposit of the very grains and fleeting sands of life ! What a business, in lieu of other more important avocations, to see it out to the last sand, and then to renew the process again on the instant, that there may not be the least flaw or error in the account ! What a strong sense must be brought home to the mind of the value and irrecoverable nature of the time that is fled ; what a thrilling, incessant consciousness of the slippery tenure by which we hold what remains of it ! Our very existence must seem crumbling to atoms, and running down (without a miraculous reprieve) to the last fragment. "Dust to dust and ashes to ashes" is a text that might be fairly inscribed on an hour-glass : it is ordinarily associated with the scythe of Time and a Death's-head, as a *memento mori* ; and has, no doubt, furnished many a tacit hint to the apprehensive and visionary enthusiast in favour of a resurrection to another life !

The French give a different turn to things, less *sombre* and less edifying. A common and also a very pleasing ornament to a clock in Paris, is a figure of Time seated in a boat which Cupid is rowing along, with the motto, *L'Amour fait passer le Temps*—which the wits again have travestied into *Le Temps fait passer*

* "Once more, companion of the lonely hour,
I'll turn thee up again."

Bloomfield's Poems—The Widow to her Hour-glass.

l'Amour. All this is ingenious and well ; but it wants sentiment. I like a people who have something that they love and something that they hate, and with whom everything is not alike a matter of indifference or *pour passer le temps*. The French attach no importance to anything, except for the moment ; they are only thinking how they shall get rid of one sensation for another ; all their ideas are *in transitu*. Everything is detached, nothing is accumulated. It would be a million of years before a Frenchman would think of the *Horas non numero nisi serenas*. Its impassioned repose and *ideal* voluptuousness are as far from their breasts as the poetry of that line in Shakspeare—“ How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank ! ” * They never arrive at the classical—or the romantic. They blow the bubbles of vanity, fashion, and pleasure ; but they do not expand their perceptions into refinement, or strengthen them into solidity. Where there is nothing fine in the groundwork of the imagination, nothing fine in the superstructure can be produced. They are light, airy, fanciful (to give them their due)—but when they attempt to be serious (beyond mere good sense) they are either dull or extravagant. When the volatile salt has flown off, nothing but a *caput mortuum* remains. They have infinite crotchets and caprices with their clocks and watches, which seem made for anything but to tell the hour—gold repeaters, watches with metal covers, clocks with hands to count the seconds. There is no escaping from quackery and impertinence, even in our attempts to calculate the

* “ Merchant of Venice,” v. 1.

waste of time. The years gallop fast enough for me, without remarking every moment as it flies; and further, I must say I dislike a watch (whether of French or English manufacture) that comes to me like a footpad with its face muffled, and does not present its clear, open aspect like a friend, and point with its finger to the time of day. All this opening and shutting of dull, heavy cases (under pretence that the glass lid is liable to be broken, or lets in the dust or air and obstructs the movements of the watch), is not to husband time, but to give trouble. It is mere pomposity and self-importance, like consulting a mysterious oracle that one carries about with one in one's pocket, instead of asking a common question of an acquaintance or companion. There are two clocks which strike the hour in the room where I am. This I do not like. In the first place, I do not want to be reminded twice how the time goes (it is like the second tap of a saucy servant at your door when perhaps you have no wish to get up): in the next place, it is starting a difference of opinion on the subject, and I am averse to every appearance of wrangling and disputation. Time moves on the same, whatever disparity there may be in our mode of keeping count of it, like true fame in spite of the cavils and contradictions of the critics. I am no friend to repeating watches. The only pleasant association I have with them is the account given by Rousseau of some French lady, who sat up reading the *New Eloise* when it first came out, and ordering her maid to sound the repeater, found it was too late to go to bed, and continued reading on till morning. Yet how different is the interest excited by this story from

the account which Rousseau somewhere else gives of his sitting up with his father reading romances, when a boy, till they were startled by the swallows twittering in their nests at daybreak, and the father cried out, half angry and ashamed—" *Allons, mon fils ; je suis plus enfant que toi !* " In general, I have heard repeating watches sounded in stage-coaches at night, when some fellow-traveller suddenly awaking and wondering what was the hour, another has very deliberately taken out his watch, and pressing the spring, it has counted out the time ; each petty stroke acting like a sharp puncture on the ear, and informing me of the dreary hours I had already passed, and of the more dreary ones I had to wait till morning.

The great advantage, it is true, which clocks have over watches and other dumb reckoners of time is, that for the most part they strike the hour—that they are as it were the mouth-pieces of time ; that they not only point it to the eye, but impress it on the ears ; that they "lend it both an understanding and a tongue." Time thus speaks to us in an audible and warning voice. Objects of sight are easily distinguished by the sense, and suggest useful reflections to the mind ; sounds, from their intermittent nature, and perhaps other causes, appeal more to the imagination, and strike upon the heart. But to do this, they must be unexpected and involuntary—there must be no trick in the case—they should not be squeezed out with a finger and a thumb ; there should be nothing optional, personal in their occurrence ; they should be like stern, inflexible monitors, that nothing can prevent from discharging their duty. Surely, if there is any-

thing with which we should not mix up our vanity and self-consequence, it is with Time, the most independent of all things. All the sublimity, all the superstition that hang upon this palpable mode of announcing its flight, are chiefly attached to this circumstance. Time would lose its abstracted character, if we kept it like a curiosity or a jack-in-the-box : its prophetic warnings would have no effect, if it obviously spoke only at our prompting like a paltry ventriloquism. The clock that tells the coming, dreaded hour—the castle bell, that “with its brazen throat and iron tongue, sounds *one* unto the drowsy ear of night”—the curfew, “swinging slow with sullen roar” o’er wizard stream or fountain, are like a voice from other worlds, big with unknown events. The last sound, which is still kept up as an old custom in many parts of England, is a great favourite with me. I used to hear it when a boy. It tells a tale of other times. The days that are past, the generations that are gone, the tangled forest glades and hamlets brown of my native country, the woodman’s art, the Norman warrior armed for the battle or in his festive hall, the conqueror’s iron rule and peasant’s lamp extinguished, all start up at the clamorous peal, and fill my mind with fear and wonder. I confess, nothing at present interests me but what has been—the recollections of the impressions of my early life, or events long past, of which only the dim traces remain in a mouldering ruin or half-obsolete custom. That *things should be that are now no more*, creates in my mind the most unfeigned astonishment. I cannot solve the mystery of the past, nor exhaust my pleasure in it. The years,

the generations to come, are nothing to me. We care no more about the world in the year 2,300 than we do about one of the planets. We might as well make a voyage to the moon as think of stealing a march upon Time with impunity. *De non apparentibus et non existentibus eadem est ratio.* Those who are to come after us and push us from the stage seem like upstarts and pretenders, that may be said to exist *in vacuo*, we know not upon what, except as they are blown up with vanity and self-conceit by their patrons among the moderns. But the ancients are true and *bonâ fide* people, to whom we are bound by aggregate knowledge and filial ties, and in whom, seen by the mellow light of history, we feel our own existence doubled and our pride consoled, as we ruminate on the vestiges of the past. The public in general, however, do not carry this speculative indifference about the future to what is to happen to themselves, or to the part they are to act in the busy scene. For my own part, I do ; and the only wish I can form, or that ever prompts the passing sigh, would be to live some of my years over again—they would be those in which I enjoyed and suffered most !

The ticking of a clock in the night has nothing very interesting nor very alarming in it, though superstition has magnified it into an omen. In a state of vigilance or debility, it preys upon the spirits like the persecution of a teasing, pertinacious insect ; and haunting the imagination after it has ceased in reality, is converted into the death-watch. Time is rendered vast by contemplating its minute portions thus repeatedly and painfully urged upon its attention, as the ocean

in its immensity is composed of water-drops. A clock striking with a clear and silver sound is a great relief in such circumstances, breaks the spell, and resembles a sylph-like and friendly spirit in the room. Foreigners with all their tricks and contrivances upon clocks and time-pieces, are strangers to the sound of village bells, though perhaps a people that can dance may dispense with them. They impart a pensive, wayward pleasure to the mind, and are a kind of chronology of happy events, often serious in the retrospect—births, marriages, and so forth. Coleridge calls them “the poor man’s only music.” A village spire in England peeping from its cluster of trees is always associated in imagination with this cheerful accompaniment, and may be expected to pour its joyous tidings on the gale. In Catholic countries, you are stunned with the everlasting tolling of bells to prayers or for the dead. In the Apennines, and other wild and mountainous districts of Italy, the little chapel-bell with its simple tinkling sound has a romantic and charming effect. The monks in former times appear to have taken a pride in the construction of bells as well as churches ; and some of those of the great cathedrals abroad (as at Cologne and Rouen) may be fairly said to be hoarse with counting the flight of ages. The chimes in Holland are a nuisance. They dance in the hours and the quarters. They leave no respite to the imagination. Before one set has done ringing in your ears, another begins. You do not know whether the hours move or stand still, go backwards or forwards, so fantastical and perplexing are their accompaniments. Time is a more staid personage, and

not so full of gambols. It puts you in mind of a tune with variations, or of an embroidered dress. Surely, nothing is more simple than Time. His march is straightforward ; but we should have leisure allowed us to look back upon the distance we have come, and not be counting his steps every moment. Time in Holland is a foolish old fellow with all the antics of a youth, who " goes to church in a coranto, and lights his pipe in a cinquepace." The chimes with us, on the contrary, as they come in every three or four hours, are like stages in the journey of the day. They give a fillip to the lazy, creeping hours, and relieve the lassitude of country-places. At noon, their desultory, trivial song is diffused through the hamlet with the odour of rashers of bacon ; at the close of day they send the toil-worn sleepers to their beds. Their discontinuance would be a great loss to the thinking or unthinking public. Mr. Wordsworth has painted their effect on the mind when he makes his friend Matthew, in a fit of inspired dotage,

" Sing those witty rhymes
About the crazy old church-clock
And the bewilder'd chimes."

The tolling of the bell for deaths and executions is a fearful summons, though, as it announces, not the advance of time but the approach of fate, it happily makes no part of our subject. Otherwise, the " sound of the bell " for Macheath's execution in the *Beggars' Opera*, or for that of the Conspirators in *Venice Preserved*, with the roll of the drum at a soldier's funeral, and a digression to that of my Uncle Toby, as it is so finely described by Sterne, would furnish ample topics

to descant upon. If I were a moralist, I might disapprove the ringing in the new and ringing out the old year.

“Why dance ye, mortals, o’er the grave of Time?”

St. Paul’s bell tolls only for the death of our English kings, or a distinguished personage or two, with long intervals between.*

Those who have no artificial means of ascertaining the progress of time are in general the most acute in discerning its immediate signs, and are most retentive of individual dates. The mechanical aids to knowledge are not sharpeners of the wits. The understanding of a savage is a kind of natural almanac, and more true in its prognostication of the future. In his mind’s eye he sees what has happened or what is likely to happen to him, “as in a map the voyager his course.” Those who read the times and seasons in the aspect of the heavens and the configuration of the stars, who count by moons and know when the sun rises and sets, are by no means ignorant of their own affairs or of the common concatenation of events. People in such situations have not their faculties distracted by any multiplicity of inquiries beyond what befalls themselves, and the outward appearances that mark the change. There is, therefore, a simplicity and clearness in the knowledge they possess, which often puzzles the more learned. I am sometimes surprised at a shepherd-boy by the road-side, who sees nothing but

* Rousseau has admirably described the effect of bells on the imagination in a passage in the “Confessions,” beginning, “*Le son des cloches m’a toujours singulièrement affecté,*” etc.

the earth and sky, asking me the time of day—he ought to know so much better than any one how far the sun is above the horizon. I suppose he wants to ask a question of a passenger, or to see if he has a watch. Robinson Crusoe lost his reckoning in the monotony of his life and that bewildering dream of solitude, and was fain to have recourse to the notches in a piece of wood. What a diary was his ! And how time must have spread its circuit round him, vast and pathless as the ocean !

For myself, I have never had a watch nor any other mode of keeping time in my possession, nor ever wish to learn how time goes. It is a sign I have had little to do, few avocations, few engagements. When I am in a town, I can hear the clock ; and when I am in the country, I can listen to the silence. What I like best is to lie whole mornings on a sunny bank on Salisbury Plain, without any object before me, neither knowing nor caring how time passes, and thus “with light-winged toys of feathered Idleness” to melt down hours to moments. Perhaps some such thoughts as I have here set down float before me like motes before my half-shut eyes— or some vivid image of the past by forcible contrast rushes by me—“Diana and her fawn, and all the glories of the antique world” ; then I start away to prevent the iron from entering my soul, and let fall some tears into that stream of time which separates me farther and farther from all I once loved ! At length I rouse myself from my reverie, and home to dinner, proud of killing time with thought, nay even without thinking. Somewhat of this idle humour I inherit from my father, though he

had not the same freedom from *ennui*, for he was not a metaphysician ; and there were stops and vacant intervals in his being which he did not know how to fill up. He used in these cases, and as an obvious resource, carefully to wind up his watch at night, and “ with lack-lustre eye ” more than once in the course of the day look to see what o’clock it was. Yet he had nothing else in his character in common with the elder Mr. Shandy. Were I to attempt a sketch of him, for my own or the reader’s satisfaction, it would be after the following manner——But now I recollect I have done something of the kind once before, and were I to resume the subject here, some bat or owl of a critic, with spectacled gravity, might swear I had stolen the whole of this Essay from myself—or (what is worse) from him ! So I had better let it go as it is.

X.

ON DISAGREEABLE PEOPLE.

THOSE people who are uncomfortable in themselves are disagreeable to others. I do not here mean to speak of persons who offend intentionally, or are obnoxious to dislike from some palpable defect of mind or body, ugliness, pride, ill-humour, etc. ; but of those who are disagreeable in spite of themselves, and, as it might appear, with almost every qualification to recommend them to others. This want of success is owing chiefly to something in what is called their *manner* ; and this again has its foundation in a certain cross-grained and unsociable state of feeling on their part, which influences us, perhaps, without our distinctly adverting to it. The mind is a finer instrument than we sometimes suppose it, and is not only swayed by overt acts and tangible proofs, but has an instinctive feeling of the air of truth. We find many individuals in whose company we pass our time, and have no particular fault to find with their understandings or character, and yet we are never thoroughly satisfied with them ; the reason will turn out to be, upon examination, that they are never thoroughly satisfied with themselves, but uneasy and out of sorts all the time ; and this makes us uneasy with them,

without our reflecting on, or being able to discover the cause.

Thus, for instance, we meet with persons who do us a number of kindnesses, who show us every mark of respect and good-will, who are friendly and serviceable—and yet we do not feel grateful to them, after all. We reproach ourselves with this as caprice or insensibility, and try to get the better of it; but there is something in their way of doing things that prevents us from feeling cordial or sincerely obliged to them. We think them very worthy people, and would be glad of an opportunity to do them a good turn if it were in our power; but we cannot get beyond this: the utmost we can do is to save appearances, and not come to an open rupture with them. The truth is, in all such cases, we do not sympathise (as we ought) with them, because they do not sympathise (as they ought) with us. They have done what they did from a sense of duty in a cold dry manner, or from a meddlesome busybody humour; or to show their superiority over us, or to patronise our infirmity; or they have dropped some hint by the way, or blundered upon some topic they should not, and have shown, by one means or other, that they were occupied with anything but the pleasure they were affording us, or a delicate attention to our feelings. Such persons may be styled *friendly grievances*. They are commonly people of low spirits and disappointed views, who see the discouraging side of human life, and, with the best intentions in the world, contrive to make everything they have to do with uncomfortable. They are alive to your distress, and take pains to remove it; but they have no satis-

faction in the gaiety and ease they have communicated, and are on the *look-out* for some new occasion of signalising their zeal; nor are they backward to insinuate that you will soon have need of their assistance to guard you against running into fresh difficulties, or to extricate you from them. From large benevolence of soul and "discourse of reason, looking before and after," they are continually reminding you of something that has gone wrong in time past, or that may do so in that which is to come, and are surprised that their awkward hints, sly inuendos, blunt questions, and solemn features do not excite all the complacency and mutual good understanding in you which it is intended that they should. When they make themselves miserable on your account, it is hard that you will not lend them your countenance and support. This deplorable humour of theirs does not hit any one else. They are useful, but not agreeable people; they may assist you in your affairs, but they depress and tyrannise over your feelings. When they have made you happy, they will not let you be so—have no enjoyment of the good they have done—will on no account part with their melancholy and desponding tone—and, by their mawkish insensibility and doleful grimaces, throw a damp over the triumph they are called upon to celebrate. They would keep you in hot water, that they may help you out of it. They will nurse you in a fit of sickness (congenial sufferers!)—arbitrate a law-suit for you, and embroil you deeper—procure you a loan of money; but all the while they are only delighted with rubbing the sore place, and casting the colour of your mental or other disorders. "The whole

need not a physician"; and, being once placed at ease and comfort, they have no farther use for you as subjects for their singular beneficence, and you are not sorry to be quit of their tiresome interference. The old proverb, *A friend in need is a friend indeed*, is not verified in them. The class of persons here spoken of are the very reverse of *summer friends*, who court you in prosperity, flatter your vanity, are the humble servants of your follies, never see or allude to anything wrong, minister to your gaiety, smooth over every difficulty, and, with the slightest approach of misfortune or of anything unpleasant, take French leave—

"As when, in prime of June, a burnish'd fly,
Sprung from the meads, o'er which he sweeps along,
Cheer'd by the breathing bloom and vital sky,
Tunes up, amid these airy halls, his song,
Soothing at first the gay reposing throng;
And oft he sips their bowl, or, nearly drown'd,
He thence recovering drives their beds among,
And scares their tender sleep with trump profound;
Then out again he flies, to wing his mazy round."*

However we may despise such triflers, yet we regret them more than those well-meaning friends on whom a dull melancholy vapour hangs, that drags them and every one about them to the ground.

Again, there are those who might be very agreeable people, if they had but spirit to be so; but there is a narrow, unaspiring, under-bred tone in all they say or do. They have great sense and information—abound in a knowledge of character—have a fund of anecdote—are unexceptionable in manners and

* Thomson's "Castle of Indolence," Canto i. st. 64, edit. 1841.

appearance—and yet we cannot make up our minds to like them : we are not glad to see them, nor sorry when they go away. Our familiarity with them, however great, wants the principle of cement, which is a certain appearance of frank cordiality and social enjoyment. They have no pleasure in the subjects of their own thoughts, and therefore can communicate none to others. There is a dry, husky, grating manner—a pettiness of detail—a tenaciousness of particulars, however trifling or unpleasant—a disposition to cavil—an aversion to enlarged and liberal views of things—in short, a hard, painful, unbending *matter-of-factness*, from which the spirit and effect are banished, and the letter only is attended to, which makes it impossible to sympathise with their discourse. To make conversation interesting or agreeable, there is required either the habitual tone of good company, which gives a favourable colouring to everything—or the warmth and enthusiasm of genius, which, though it may occasionally offend or be thrown off its guard, makes amends by its rapturous flights, and flings a glancing light upon all things. The literal and *dogged* style of conversation resembles that of a French picture, or its mechanical fidelity is like evidence given in a court of justice, or a police report.

From the literal to the plain-spoken, the transition is easy. The most efficient weapon of offence is truth. Those who deal in dry and repulsive matters-of-fact, tire out their friends ; those who blurt out hard and home truths, make themselves mortal enemies wherever they come. There are your blunt, honest creatures, who omit no opportunity of letting you know their

minds, and are sure to tell you all the ill, and conceal all the good they hear of you. They would not flatter you for the world, and to caution you against the malice of others they think the province of a friend. This is not candour, but impudence; and yet they think it odd you are not charmed with their unreserved communicativeness of disposition. Gossips and tale-bearers, on the contrary, who supply the *tittle-tattle* of the neighbourhood, flatter you to your face, and laugh at you behind your back, are welcome and agreeable guests in all companies. Though you know it will be your turn next, yet for the sake of the immediate gratification, you are contented to pay your share of the public tax upon character, and are better pleased with the falsehoods that never reach your ears, than with the truths that others (less complaisant and more sincere) utter to your face—so short-sighted and willing to be imposed upon is our self-love! There is a man, who has the air of not being convinced without an argument: you avoid him as if he were a lion in your path. There is another, who asks you fifty questions as to the commonest things you advance: you would sooner pardon a fellow who held a pistol to your breast and demanded your money. No one regards a turnpike-keeper, or a custom-house officer, with a friendly eye: he who stops you in an excursion of fancy, or ransacks the articles of your belief obstinately and churlishly, to distinguish the spurious from the genuine, is still more your foe. These inquisitors and cross-examiners upon system make ten enemies for every controversy in which they engage. The world dreads nothing so much as being convinced

of their errors. In doing them this piece of service, you make war equally on their prejudices, their interests, their pride, and indolence. You not only set up for a superiority of understanding over them, which they hate, but you deprive them of their ordinary grounds of action, their topics of discourse, of their confidence in themselves, and those to whom they have been accustomed to look up for instruction and advice. It is making children of them. You unhinge all their established opinions and trains of thought; and after leaving them in this listless, vacant, unsettled state—dissatisfied with their own notions and shocked at yours—you expect them to court and be delighted with your company, because, forsooth, you have only expressed your sincere and conscientious convictions. Mankind are not deceived by professions, unless they choose. They think that this pill of true doctrine, however it may be gilded over, is full of gall and bitterness to them; and, again, it is a maxim of which the vulgar are firmly persuaded, that plain-speaking (as it is called), nine parts in ten, is spleen and self-opinion; and the other part, perhaps, honesty. Those who will not abate an inch in argument, and are always seeking to recover the wind of you, are, in the eye of the world, disagreeable, unconscionable people, who ought to be *sent to Coventry*, or left to wrangle by themselves. No persons, however, are more averse to contradiction than these same dogmatists. What shows our susceptibility on this point is, that there is no flattery so adroit or effectual as that of implicit assent. Any one, however mean his capacity or ill-qualified to judge, who gives way to all our

sentiments, and never seems to think but as we do, is indeed an *alter idem*—another self; and we admit him without scruple into our entire confidence, “yea, into our heart of hearts.”

It is the same in books. Those which, under the disguise of plain speaking, vent paradoxes, and set their faces against the “common sense” of mankind, are neither “the volumes

“that enrich the shops,
That pass with approbation through the land”;

nor, I fear, can it be added—

“That bring their authors an immortal fame.”

They excite a clamour and opposition at first, and are in general soon consigned to oblivion. Even if the opinions are in the end adopted, the authors gain little by it, and their names remain in their original obloquy; for the public will own no obligations to such ungracious benefactors. In like manner, there are many books written in a very delightful vein, though with little in them, and that are accordingly popular. Their principle is to please, and not to offend; and they succeed in both objects. We are contented with the deference shown to our feelings for the time, and grant a truce both to wit and wisdom. The “courteous reader” and the good-natured author are well matched in this instance, and find their account in mutual tenderness and forbearance to each other’s infirmities. I am not sure that Walton’s “Angler” is not a book of this last description—

“That dallies with the innocence of thought,
Like the old time.”

Hobbes and Mandeville are in the opposite extreme, and have met with a correspondent fate. The *Tatler* and *Spectator* are in the golden mean, carry instruction as far as it can go without shocking, and give the most exquisite pleasure without one particle of pain. "*Desire to please, and you will infallibly please,*" is a maxim equally applicable to the study or the drawing-room. Thus, also, we see actors of very small pretensions, and who have scarce any other merit than that of being on good terms with themselves, and in high good humour with their parts (though they hardly understand a word of them), who are universal favourites with the audience. Others, who are masters of their art, and in whom no slip or flaw can be detected, you have no pleasure in seeing, from something dry, repulsive, and unconciliating in their manner; and you almost hate the very mention of their names, as an unavailing appeal to your candid decision in their favour, and as taxing you with injustice for refusing it.

We may observe persons who seem to take a peculiar delight in the *disagreeable*. They catch all sorts of uncouth tones and gestures, the manners and dialect of clowns and hoydens, and aim at vulgarity as desperately as others ape gentility. [This is what is often understood by a *love of low life*.] They say the most unwarrantable things, without meaning or feeling what they say. What startles or shocks other people is to them a sport—an amusing excitement—a fillip to their constitutions; and from the bluntness of their perceptions, and a certain wilfulness of spirit, not being able to enter into the refined and agreeable, they make a merit of despising everything of the kind. Masculine

women, for example, are those who, not being distinguished by the charms and delicacy of the sex, affect a superiority over it by throwing aside all decorum. We also find another class, who continually do and say what they ought not, and what they do not intend, and who are governed almost entirely by an instinct of absurdity. Owing to a perversity of imagination or irritability of nerve, the idea that a thing is improper acts as a provocation to it: the fear of committing a blunder is so strong, that in their agitation they *bolt* out whatever is uppermost in their minds, before they are aware of the consequence. The dread of something wrong haunts and rivets their attention to it; and an uneasy, morbid apprehensiveness of temper takes away their self-possession, and hurries them into the very mistakes they are most anxious to avoid.

If we look about us, and ask who are the agreeable and disagreeable people in the world, we shall see that it does not so much depend on their virtues or vices—their understanding or stupidity—as on the degree of pleasure or pain they seem to feel in ordinary social intercourse. What signify all the good qualities any one possesses, if he is none the better for them himself? If the cause is so delightful, the effect ought to be so too. We enjoy a friend's society only in proportion as he is satisfied with ours. Even wit, however it may startle, is only agreeable as it is sheathed in good-humour. There are a kind of *intellectual stammerers*, who are delivered of their good things with pain and effort; and consequently what costs them such evident uneasiness does not impart unmixed

delight to the bystanders. There are those, on the contrary, whose sallies cost them nothing, who abound in a flow of pleasantry and good-humour; and who float down the stream with them carelessly and triumphantly—

“ Wit at the helm, and Pleasure at the prow.”

Perhaps it may be said of English wit in general that it too much resembles pointed lead: after all, there is something heavy and dull in it! The race of small wits are not the least agreeable people in the world. They have their little joke to themselves, enjoy it, and do not set up any preposterous pretensions to thwart the current of our self-love. Toad-eating is accounted a thriving profession; and a *butt*, according to the *Spectator*, is a highly useful member of society—as one who takes whatever is said of him in good part, and as necessary to conduct off the spleen and superfluous petulance of the company. Opposed to these are the swaggering bullies—the licensed wits—the free-thinkers—the loud talkers, who, in the jockey phrase, have *lost their mouths*, and cannot be reined in by any regard to decency or common sense. The more obnoxious the subject, the more are they charmed with it, converting their want of feeling into a proof of superiority to vulgar prejudice and squeamish affectation. But there is an unseemly exposure of the mind, as well as of the body. There are some objects that shock the sense, and cannot with propriety be mentioned: there are naked truths that offend the mind, and ought to be kept out of sight as much as possible. For human nature cannot bear to be too

hardly pressed upon. One of these cynical truisms, when brought forward to the world, may be forgiven as a slip of the pen : a succession of them, denoting a deliberate purpose and *malice prepense*, must ruin any writer. Lord Byron had got into an irregular course of these a little before his death—seemed desirous, in imitation of Mr. Shelley, to run the gauntlet of public obloquy—and, at the same time, wishing to screen himself from the censure he defied, dedicated his “Cain” to Sir Walter Scott—a pretty godfather to such a bantling !

Some persons are of so teasing and fidgety a turn of mind, that they do not give you a moment's rest. Everything goes wrong with them. They complain of a headache or the weather. They take up a book, and lay it down again—venture an opinion, and retract it before they have half done—offer to serve you, and prevent some one else from doing it. If you dine with them at a tavern, in order to be more at your ease, the fish is too little done—the sauce is not the right one ; they ask for a sort of wine which they think is not to be had, or if it is, after some trouble, procured, do not touch it ; they give the waiter fifty contradictory orders, and are restless and sit on thorns the whole dinner-time. All this is owing to a want of robust health, and of a strong spirit of enjoyment : it is a fastidious habit of mind, produced by a valetudinary habit of body : they are out of sorts with everything, and of course their ill-humour and captiousness communicates itself to you, who are as little delighted with them as they are with other things. Another sort of people, equally objectionable with this helpless class,

who are disconcerted by a shower of rain or stopped by an insect's wing, are those who, in the opposite spirit, will have everything their own way, and carry all before them—who cannot brook the slightest shadow of opposition—who are always in the heat of an argument—who knit their brows and clench their teeth in some speculative discussion, as if they were engaged in a personal quarrel—and who, though successful over almost every competitor, seem still to resent the very offer of resistance to their supposed authority, and are as angry as if they had sustained some premeditated injury. There is an impatience of temper and an intolerance of opinion in this that conciliates neither our affection nor esteem. To such persons nothing appears of any moment but the indulgence of a domineering intellectual superiority, to the disregard and discomfiture of their own and everybody else's comfort. Mounted on an abstract proposition, they trample on every courtesy and decency of behaviour ; and though, perhaps, they do not intend the gross personalities they are guilty of, yet they cannot be acquitted of a want of due consideration for others, and of an intolerable egotism in the support of truth and justice. You may hear one of these Quixotic declaimers pleading the cause of humanity in a voice of thunder, or expatiating on the beauty of a Guido with features distorted with rage and scorn. This is not a very amiable or edifying spectacle.

There are persons who cannot make friends. Who are they ? Those who cannot be friends. It is not the want of understanding or good-nature, of entertaining or useful qualities, that you complain of :

on the contrary, they have probably many points of attraction; but they have one that neutralises all these—they care nothing about you, and are neither the better nor worse for what you think of them. They manifest no joy at your approach; and when you leave them, it is with a feeling that they can do just as well without you. This is not sullenness, nor indifference, nor absence of mind; but they are intent solely on their own thoughts, and you are merely one of the subjects they exercise them upon. They live in society as in a solitude; and, however their brain works, their pulse beats neither faster nor slower for the common accidents of life. There is, therefore, something cold and repulsive in the air that is about them—like that of marble. In a word, they are *modern philosophers*; and the modern philosopher is what the pedant was of old—a being who lives in a world of his own, and has no correspondence with this. It is not that such persons have not done you services—you acknowledge it; it is not that they have said severe things of you—you submit to it as a necessary evil; but it is the cool manner in which the whole is done that annoys you—the speculating upon you, as if you were nobody—the regarding you, with a view to an experiment *in corpore vili*—the principle of dissection—the determination to spare no blemishes—to cut you down to your real standard;—in short, the utter absence of the partiality of friendship, the blind enthusiasm of affection, or the delicacy of common decency, that whether they “hew you as a carcase fit for hounds, or carve you as a dish fit for the gods,” the operation on your feelings and your sense of obliga-

tion is just the same ; and, whether they are demons or angels in themselves, you wish them equally *at the devil !*

Other persons of worth and sense give way to mere violence of temperament (with which the understanding has nothing to do)—are burnt up with a perpetual fury—repel and throw you to a distance by their restless, whirling motion—so that you dare not go near them, or feel as uneasy in their company as if you stood on the edge of a volcano. They have their *tempora mollia fandi* ; but then what a stir may you not expect the next moment ! Nothing is less inviting or less comfortable than this state of uncertainty and apprehension. Then there are those who never approach you without the most alarming advice or information, telling you that you are in a dying way, or that your affairs are on the point of ruin, by way of disburthening their consciences ; and others who give you to understand much the same thing as a good joke, out of sheer impertinence, constitutional vivacity, and want of something to say. All these, it must be confessed, are disagreeable people ; and you repay their over-anxiety or total forgetfulness of you, by a determination to *cut* them as speedily as possible. We meet with instances of persons who overpower you by a sort of boisterous mirth and rude animal spirits, with whose ordinary state of excitement it is as impossible to keep up as with that of any one really intoxicated ; and with others who seem scarce alive—who take no pleasure or interest in anything—who are born to exemplify the maxim,

“ Not to admire is all the art I know
To make men happy, or to keep them so,—”

and whose mawkish insensibility or sullen scorn are equally annoying. In general, all people brought up in remote country places, where life is crude and harsh—all sectaries—all partisans of a losing cause, are discontented and disagreeable. Commend me above all to the Westminster School of Reform, whose blood runs as cold in their veins as the torpedo's, and whose touch jars like it. Catholics are, upon the whole, more amiable than Protestants—foreigners than English people. Among ourselves, the Scotch, as a nation, are particularly disagreeable. They hate every appearance of comfort themselves, and refuse it to others. Their climate, their religion, and their habits are equally averse to pleasure. Their manners are either distinguished by a fawning sycophancy (to gain their own ends, and conceal their natural defects), that makes one sick; or by a morose, unbending callousness, that makes one shudder. I had forgot to mention two other descriptions of persons who fall under the scope of this essay:—those who take up a subject, and run on with it interminably, without knowing whether their hearers care one word about it, or in the least minding what reception their oratory meets with—these are pretty generally voted *bore*s (mostly German ones);—and others, who may be designated as practical paradox-mongers—who discard the “milk of human kindness,” and an attention to common observances, from all their actions, as effeminate and puling—who wear an out-of-the-way hat as a mark of superior understanding, and carry home a handkerchief full of mushrooms in the top of it as an original discovery—who give you craw-fish for supper

instead of lobsters ; seek their company in a garret, and over a gin-bottle, to avoid the imputation of affecting genteel society ; and discard their friends after a term of years, and warn others against them, as being *honest fellows*, which is thought a vulgar prejudice. This is carrying the harsh and repulsive even beyond the disagreeable—to the hateful. Such persons are generally people of commonplace understandings, obtuse feelings, and inordinate vanity. They are formidable if they get you in their power—otherwise, they are only to be laughed at.

There are a vast number who are disagreeable from meanness of spirit, downright insolence, from slovenliness of dress or disgusting tricks, from folly or ignorance ; but these causes are positive moral or physical defects, and I only meant to speak of that repulsiveness of manners which arises from want of tact and sympathy with others. So far of friendship : a word, if I durst, of love. Gallantry to women (the sure road to their favour) is nothing but the appearance of extreme devotion to all their wants and wishes—a delight in their satisfaction, and a confidence in yourself, as being able to contribute towards it. The slightest indifference with regard to them, or distrust of yourself, are equally fatal. The amiable is the voluptuous in looks, manner, or words. No face that exhibits this kind of expression—whether lively or serious, obvious or suppressed, will be thought ugly—no address, awkward—no lover who approaches every woman he meets as his mistress, will be unsuccessful. Diffidence and awkwardness are the two antidotes to love.

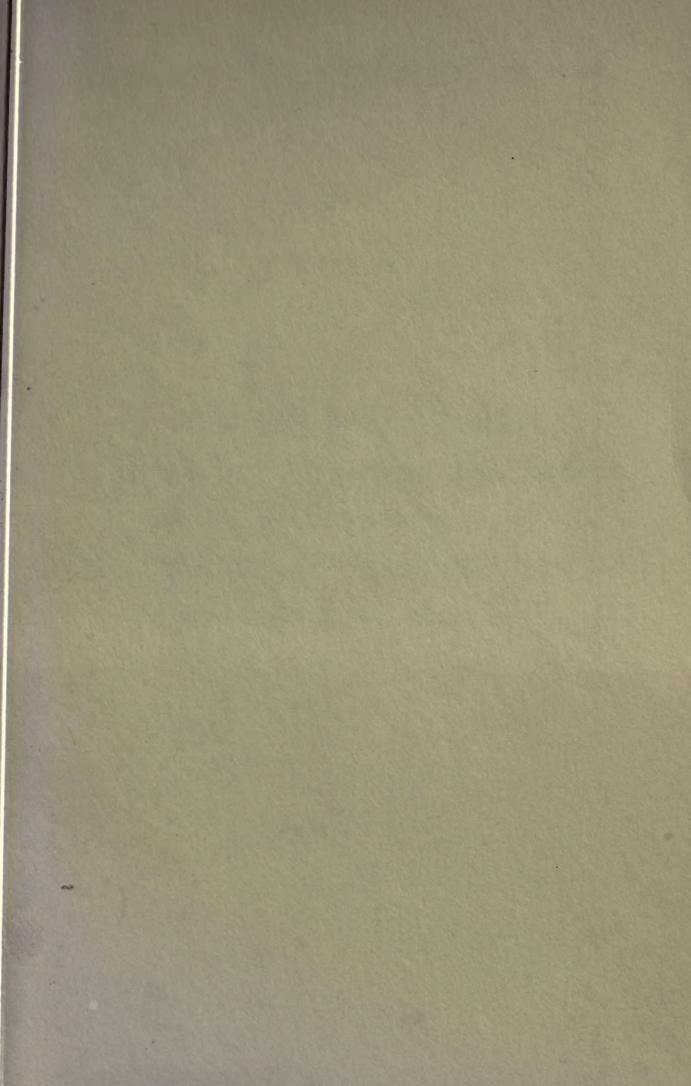
To please universally, we must be pleased with our-

selves and others. There should be a tinge of the coxcomb, an oil of self-complacency, an anticipation of success—there should be no gloom, no moroseness, no shyness—in short, there should be very little of the Englishman, and a good deal of the Frenchman. But though, I believe, this is the receipt, we are none the nearer making use of it. It is impossible for those who are naturally disagreeable ever to become otherwise. This is some consolation, as it may save a world of useless pains and anxiety. “*Desire to please, and you will infallibly please,*” is a true maxim; but it does not follow that it is in the power of all to practise it. A vain man, who thinks he is endeavouring to please, is only endeavouring to shine, and is still farther from the mark. An irritable man, who puts a check upon himself, only grows dull, and loses spirit to be anything. Good temper and a happy turn of mind (which are the indispensable requisites) can no more be commanded than good health or good looks; and though the plain and sickly need not distort their features, and may abstain from excess, this is all they can do. The utmost a disagreeable person can do is to hope, by care and study, to become less disagreeable than he is, and to pass unnoticed in society. With this negative character he should be contented, and may build his fame and happiness on other things.

I will conclude with a description of men who neither please nor aspire to please anybody, and who can come in nowhere so properly as at the fag-end of an essay—I mean that class of discontented but amusing persons, who are infatuated with their own ill success, and reduced to despair by a lucky turn in their favour.

While all goes well, they are *like fish out of water*. They have no reliance on, or sympathy with, their good fortune, and look upon it as a momentary delusion. Let a doubt be thrown on the question, and they begin to be full of lively apprehensions again: let all their hopes vanish, and they feel themselves on firm ground once more. From want of spirit, or from habit, their imaginations cannot rise above the low ground of humility—cannot reflect the gay, flaunting tints of the fancy—flag and droop into despondency—and can neither indulge the expectation nor employ the means of success. Even when it is within their reach, they dare not lay hands upon it; and shrink from unlooked-for bursts of prosperity, as something of which they are both ashamed and unworthy. The class of *croakers* here spoken of are less delighted with other people's misfortunes than with their own. Their neighbours may have some pretensions—they have none. Querulous complaints and anticipations of discomfort are the food on which they live; and they at last acquire a passion for that which is the favourite theme of their thoughts, and can no more do without it than without the pinch of snuff with which they season their conversation, and enliven the pauses of their daily prognostics.

THE END.



PR
4771
H4

Hazlitt, William
Essays

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY
